

THE KING OF HOLLYWOOD

The story, of
CLARK GABLE

Also by CHARLES SAMUELS

HIS EYE IS ON THE SPARROW (*with Ethel Waters*)

CHARLES SAMUELS

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Clark Gable



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I

In the Good Old Turn of the Century

By one of those oddities of history that delight both scholars and simpletons Clark Gable was born just as Queen Victoria's funeral was taking place. There were even more soothsayers around then than now, but none of them seemed aware that the most exciting sex symbol of modern times was entering the world precisely as the doughtiest advocate of restrained behaviour in the boudoir was leaving it.

As a result, no dignitaries, wise men or great journalists were on hand to welcome Mr. Gable on his very first appearance at Cadiz, Ohio, at 3.30 a.m. on February 1, 1901. Nevertheless, being an actor, he managed a début in circumstances melodramatic enough to impress a whole wine-cellarful of Barrymores.

Outside was raging the whirling scot of snowstorm that old folks keep on saying we never have any more. His father, William H. Gable, an oil wildcatter, had battled his way through the snow-choked streets to the home of Dr. John S. Campbell. On waking him up, Mr. Gable said the sort of thing expectant fathers have been saying to sleepy physicians for years.

"Hurry up, for God's sake, Doc! Addie's time has come!"

Dr. Campbell, an easygoing man with a sense of humour, was for once not amused. He doubted very much that he could pull Mrs. Gable through, and for good reason; she was an epileptic.

Dressing in no time, he followed her husband out into the snowy night. The Gables lived in two small rooms on the upper floor of a two-story clapboard house on Charleston Street. You reached these rooms by climbing a flight of stairs built outside the house. With the

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wind howling threats through their earmuffs, the two men started up.

"Hang on to the railings, Doc," Will Gable shouted over his shoulder, "these stairs are sure slippery tonight."

On getting safely inside, they could hear Mrs. Gable moaning in the bedroom. A wash boiler bubbling full of hot water was on the wood stove in the kitchen, attended by Mrs. Reese, who lived downstairs. Her husband, T. J. Reese, worked in the oil fields with Will Gable.

The delivery was the nightmare Doc Campbell had feared. But like many another turn-of-the-century country doctor, he was especially adept and resourceful at delivering babies.

At three-thirty on that blustery, frost-bitten morning, Dr. Campbell walked into the kitchen and told Mr. Gable, "It's a boy, Will, and is he a whopper! I'd say that he weighs more than nine pounds!" As Dr. Campbell pulled on his boots, fur cap and heavy coat, he remarked, "But I'm worried about Addie. She had a bad time of it."

Though gravely worried about his wife, Will could not conceal his exultation when Mrs. Reese brought out the baby. She permitted him to hold the infant for a moment, and he whooped, "Why he's a regular little blacksmith! What an oil driller he's going to make!"

As soon as the Harrison County Probate and Juvenile Court opened on that stormy February morning Will registered the infant. But the clerk, befuddled by what he had drunk to fortify himself against the wild and battering weather, made the curious mistake of marking "F" for female after the child's name, William Clark Gable. The mistake was quickly rectified by a red line drawn through the "F" and an "M" was written over it. But the father was furious enough to re-register his little blacksmith (whom it turned out weighed *nine and a quarter* pounds) one hundred and twenty miles away at Meadville, across the Pennsylvania line, where his own family and his wife's had lived for generations.

Thirty years later William Clark Gable became the most popular romantic star show business ever produced. From then until the day he died, at fifty-nine, he was loved by millions of women, admired by their husbands, and worshipped by children.

There is a good deal worth pondering in the long-lived universal popularity of this Hollywood idol. Gable was not the greatest actor in the world, nor the best-looking. What he had wanted out of life when young was what most of us want: a way of making a living that interested him and gave him enough income to live comfortably and a wife

and a family who would love and respect him. On the surface, at least, Clark inherited little of the artistic spirit of his mother, an amateur painter.

Gable was born with an animal attraction that overwhelmed women. It took him some time to learn how to use this in his acting with an effectiveness beyond the power of any of his rivals. It enabled him to play the role of a romantic lover long past the age when others seem only ridiculous. But it was not just the fans who loved him. His co-workers gave him an affection and a respect that they withhold from most stars. Most Hollywood stars are detested and despised by the studio craftsmen who have to work with them, day after day.

Yet Gable was no saint. He was tight with money, quite rough on many of the women who loved him, and seldom let anyone get really close to him. He could accept the love of women and the friendship of men only on his terms. But Gable was not a complicated man; he lived as completely as possible for and inside the present moment. He both acted and made love in his private life as though there was no yesterday and no tomorrow. He promised women nothing. They had to accept him on his terms.

He was a natural gentleman, a breed not often found in any branch of the theatrical world. It never seemed to occur to him to exploit the men and women who admired him. He was not very good with words, nor too bright. But his ability to use everything he had in his work showed the gift for utter concentration that triumphed over his limitations.

Dore Schary, the gifted playwright who ran Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer during Clark's last and stormiest years there, told one of the actor's biographers, "This man was the most unusual acting figure ever to appear in Hollywood. But if it took a hundred years for historians to separate the legends from the facts about Lincoln, how are you going to find out the truth about Gable within a year, or two, or ten?"

The legends, in fact, begin before he was born, with his mother, Adelia Hershelman Gable, the epileptic. Her father, a prosperous farmer, realized that her oil paintings were quite unusual and offered to send her to Paris to study for as long as she liked. In reality he was more interested in breaking up her romance with Will Gable, the rough, wild-hearted son of Charles and Nancy Gable, who owned an hotel and farm near by. By then Will had left farming to become a wildcatter in the oil fields.

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Young Gable was a rip, though he had not yet found enough oil to go in for luxurious debauchery. He was a fine-looking man, built as his son was later like an anvil, with enormous shoulders and slim waist. He had almost superhuman strength. The neighbours had learned to keep a sharp eye on their plump wives, sisters and daughters whenever Wild Will was reported in the vicinity. There was also a religious difference. Gable was a Protestant, the Hershelmanns Catholics.

Adelia went to Paris, but stayed there only a year. When she came home she told her parents she felt it wrong to waste any more of their money, since she had only a modest talent. She and Will were married soon afterwards and moved to Cadiz. The two little rooms were quite a change for the young woman who had spent all her life in her parents' spacious farmhouse. But she did not mind, for she was madly in love with her husband.

Dr. John S. Campbell, then thirty-eight and a graduate of the University of Michigan's Homeopathic Medicine School, became a special friend of hers. The doctor was a well-read, knowledgeable man and the year in Europe had broadened Addie's interests. Will and the neighbours admired her oils, but Dr. Campbell understood them. The two talked a great deal about painting and the other arts,

The day when Dr. Campbell confirmed Adelia's suspicion that she was pregnant was a jubilant one for her, but a dark day for the country doctor. More than a week passed before he could bring himself to tell her that having a baby might kill her. Adelia seemed neither worried nor surprised. But she made the doctor promise to say nothing to her husband, as he would worry needlessly about it.

When Adelia wrote to her family with the news she asked her sister Josie to visit her in Cadiz. When Josie arrived, Adelia told her of Dr. Campbell's fears.

She was convinced that the doctor was wrong. Nevertheless, she had written a series of eighteen letters to her unborn child and numbered them consecutively. As soon as he became old enough to understand, Josie was to read the first of them to him, the next one six months later. When he became old enough to read for himself, she was to give another to him each six months. She appeared certain the baby would be a boy.

"Promise me that you will give them to my baby in case I die, Josie. If you do, the child will grow up knowing the sort of person his mother was, and the sort of man I would like him to be. You swear you will give my baby the letters, Josie?"

Josie, with her heart turning over, promised.

That is the legend.

Carole Lombard, Gable's third wife and the great love of his life, is said to have told the story of the letters to friends. And if these messages from the grave were read by Gable during the years he was growing up, they obviously would have had a profound effect upon his character. But Gable's closest friends insist that they never existed.

After her son was born, Adelia never had a well day.

Though he was working twelve hours a day at the time, Will tried to care for his wife and son himself with whatever help his neighbours could give him. When it became too much for him, he took them to the Hershelman farm, but nothing seemed to help. Adelia grew steadily weaker. Will made the 120-mile trip to Meadville to see them as often as he could manage it.

On one of his visits Adelia looked worse than he'd ever seen her. But she smiled wanly as he came into the room.

Addie died a few weeks later, on November 14, and was buried in a Catholic cemetery near her home. At first the baby was cared for by his Aunt Josie. Then Addie's brother, Tom Hershelman, and Tom's wife took over. Will insisted on giving them \$100 a year, paid in advance, for their trouble.

To please Addie, he had reluctantly consented to having his little blacksmith baptized a Catholic, but it disturbed him that the Hershels might try to bring up the child in their faith.

On April 16, 1903, when his son was a little over two, Will remarried. His bride was a gentle, plain-looking spinster, Jennie Dunlap, a Methodist. She was a milliner in Hopedale, a small coal-mining town less than ten miles from Cadiz.

Will told Jennie, who had never seen the child, that it might be better if he went alone to Meadville to get him. Perhaps it was just as well. The Tom Hershels had fallen in love with the little boy and were disconsolate at the thought of losing him. They also said that Addie had told them on her death-bed that she wanted the boy brought up in her faith.

"If she did," muttered Will Gable, "she kept it a secret from me." He explained that one of the reasons he had married again was to give his motherless boy a home of his own. He had bought a four-acre tract on the outskirts of Hopedale and planned to build the house there. But he did agree to let the boy spend some time each year with them, during the summer or at Christmas.

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"That's if you'll promise not to try to turn him into a Catholic," said Will.

And Billy spent many a boyhood summer with the Hershelms and also his father's people, Charles and Nancy Gable. When Will's little blacksmith grew up he recalled as the great times in his boyhood the Christmases and summer vacations on their farms. The older Hershelms spoke German to one another, but English to him. "They loved me," he said, "and scolded me, rocked me to sleep, spanked me when necessary, did everything in their power to bring me up in the right way.

"I followed my grandfather wherever he went, lay under the maple trees, chased squirrels through the woods behind the house, learned to swim in the lake and slid down the warm hay in the big barn. I remember my grandmother knitting a red cap, and mittens to match, for me. 'You will wear these when you start going to school, Billy,' she told me.

The actor also explained. "But we weren't a laughing family. We were Dutch and German farmers. My people were sober-minded folks who took themselves and their work seriously."

His stepmother, Jennie Dunlap, was different: a laughing, life-loving person. Night had come by the time Will returned from Meadville that Sunday with the youngster, and she had been waiting for them for hours at the window.

Will picked up the boy, who had fallen asleep, carried him in, and put him in her arms. "Here he is, Jennie," was all he said. But his son, for the rest of his life, declared, "The best day of my life was the day I met my stepmother."

For many years now Cadiz, the birthplace of Clark Gable, has been calling itself "the proudest small town in America". But it certainly does not look it. To visitors it is just one more ugly little Ohio mining town.

The pride of Cadiz lies in the fact that not only Gable but nine other illustrious Americans were born there or on the surrounding farms. A bronze plaque in the town square immortalizes their names. General George A. Custer heads the list.

For thirty years, however, the tourists who visited Cadiz proved to be interested only in Clark Gable, in seeing the house where he was born and buying souvenir postcards of it.

Gable's boyhood was typical of that wonderful turn-of-the-century

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time. The one person who could have made Gable's adolescent years seem unusual was Jennie Dunlap, his stepmother.

Jennie never had a child of her own. She was a religious woman and for fourteen years never went to bed without thanking God for giving her this wonderful and always happy little boy for her own. There was nothing his real mother could have done for him that she did not do. She gave him his first lessons in the difficult art of being a human being, was the audience always waiting to hear of his adventures at play or at school, his troubles and triumphs. She knew also how to discipline him and defend him from that monstrous giant, his father.

And, of course, she spoiled him. When he was little she let him carry a lantern at night because he was afraid of the dark. She did his lessons with him, taught him to sing and play the piano, sneaked food to him when Will Gable ordered him to bed without supper, overpraised his achievements. Her husband, of course, would have given a somewhat different account of his son's early years. Billy was his replica in looks, but not in temperament.

It took Will Gable two years to build the six-room house on the four-acre tract he'd bought in Hopedale. Until it was finished the Gables lived with Jennie's sister, Mary Ella, and her two brothers, John and Edson, who were coal miners. His new-found aunt and uncles spoiled him shamelessly.

The Dunlaps were simple, hard-working mining people, who never saw a film until they went to see their boy Billy in one called *A Free Soul*. In that picture Gable, the villain, was shot to death. When Aunt Mary Ella actually heard the shot and saw him clutch his stomach and fall, nothing could convince her it was only make-believe. She jumped up, flung her hands in the air and shrieked, "Oh, they got my boy." Even after they got her outside the cinema her brothers had to talk to her for a quarter of an hour before she became convinced that her nephew was not dead.

Being the town milliner, Jennie was more worldly than her sister. In those days small-town milliners heard all the community scandals, secrets, and other gossip from their customers.

If Billy got much affection from his stepmother, he got none at all from his father. Will Gable, a silent, glum man, was a good provider and could be generous with gifts. Will was undisputed lord and master in his home.

Will Gable was puzzled, however, because Billy always managed to avoid fights, and even more by something else he heard. With the

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other boys Billy would go out and set traps. But when they went to kill the animals caught in them, Billy would refuse even to watch them.

"Try not to tease him about that," Jennie begged Will when he spoke to her about it. "He is as manly as the other boys, but he is also gentle and more sensitive than most youngsters. He just can't tolerate seeing things die. Have you forgotten how he went on about that dog you brought home?"

Will nodded. One day, when Billy was small, he had brought home a little yellow mongrel he had found on the street. The dog and the boy were inseparable. An irascible neighbour, weary of having to stop his hunting dog from fighting with the mongrel, shot the dog one night. That was the only time Will ever saw his son cry.

Billy's singing started in the first grade. In that class children learned their lessons by singing songs to Miss Thompson's guitar accompaniment. Billy, the biggest child in the class, sang the loudest of all. Because of his great lung power (he was said to be the only six-year-old baritone in the history of music), he was one of the five children Miss Thompson selected to perform in the institution's annual Christmas entertainment. That year they were to appear in "The Teddy Bear Drill". Dressed in Teddy bear suits and masks, the quintet was to sing a special song Miss Thompson had written for the occasion. It was called:

TEDDY BEARS HAVE FEELINGS, TOO,
It's True, They Are Just Like You!

When the great evening came, Billy was letter-perfect in the lyrics which described the anguish of Teddy bears whose owners had cruelly torn off their ears and gouged out their glass eyes. But there seemed to be no humanitarians in the school auditorium that night. They howled with derisive mirth as soon as the five started to sing. All but one of the small choristers stopped singing and fled in shame. Billy Gable alone stood his ground and sang on and on to the end, with Miss Thompson strumming her guitar valiantly.

Knowing Billy's eagerness for his father to hear and admire his singing, Jennie kept urging her husband to attend one of the musical fêtes the boy appeared in at school, at church, whenever possible. It took four years of coaxing by Jennie before Will consented to attend a concert at which Billy sang "Silver Threads Among the Gold" as a duet with a girl.

The experiment was not repeated. For after that, each time Will

was annoyed by something his son had done he sang that maudlin song to him off-key.

In high school, young Gable's marks were average. As a freshman he got 75 in maths, 77 in science, 77 English, 73 Latin, and 85 in spelling. Among the American lower and middle classes scholarship was held in higher repute then than now.

When Billy was thirteen he joined the town band, which was supposed to be restricted to adults. He played what Hopedalers called the sliphorn. The band was trying to raise money for uniforms by appearing at weddings, civic functions and church picnics. By May the leader was able to send away for the uniforms. The bandsmen hoped to wear them in the big Fourth of July parade. They arrived in time, but too late to be altered. And they all needed altering badly.

The manufacturer seemed to have imagined all the Hopedale horn-tooters, drum-beaters and cymbal-bangers were giants. And Billy, being the smallest member in the outfit, needed a major operation on his uniform. But it was a beautiful thing, all white cloth and glittering gold braid. The leader told him to roll up the arms of the coat and the legs of the trousers. He had to hop along, taking two steps for one of the others, and his hat would have fallen over his face, if not for his large ears.

His father, as well as Jenny, had watched the parade. When he got home, Billy said,

"Guess I looked pretty silly,"

"No sillier than the rest," his father grunted. "Their hats kept falling down. Some of them couldn't see half the time where they were going. It isn't everybody, kid, who has big ears like you and me that stick out enough to hold their hats in place."

There was one other thing about the boy that Will Gable admired, though he refused to admit it. This was Billy's eagerness to pull his own weight. The summer before, though only twelve, the boy had asked for permission to work as a delivery boy for the local mill.

"Won't that be kinda hard work for a kid like you?" his father asked.

Billy said, "All I have to do is drive the wagon and drop the flour off at the stores around the county."

A week later his father saw him on the street. His husky twelve-year-old was unloading 100-pound sacks of flour and carrying them into a store. To Billy's embarrassment, his father went into the store and upbraided the grocer for not helping the youngster unload the

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flour. One look at Will Gable's angry eyes and the frightened grocer rushed out to assist the lad. No work seemed too hard for him, including working as water boy for the coal miners. Ohio is hot during July and August, and its coal miners are hotter.

Ironically his enthusiasm for hard work deluded Will Gable into thinking the boy would enjoy working for him. So he sold his home in Hopedale, his oil-drilling outfit and bought a large farm near Ravenna, Ohio, sixty miles from Hopedale.

"I'm going to try farming again," he told Jennie and Billy. Turning to the boy, he explained, "This will give us a chance to work together. Nothing like father and son working together, kid."

Aghast at the idea of moving away from all his friends, Billy exclaimed, "But, Dad, you always told me you did not like working for your father."

"Well, that was different, kid. You see, he never understood me."

A Dream Turns into a Nightmare

ALL his life Clark Gable remained a Socrates on just one subject: the backbreaking jobs he'd had as a young fellow. About the wholesome agricultural life as his father's right-hand man at Ravenna, he said:

"Working on that farm meant getting up at four in the morning every day in the year, spring, summer, fall and winter, and the winters are sure cold in Ohio.

"I fed the hogs, the rest of the stock, ploughed in the spring until every muscle ached, forked hay in the hot sun until I was sweating crops of callouses. I did what I was expected to do on the farm, but it takes a certain knack for farming in the old-fashioned way. I just didn't have what it takes."

His school was five miles from the farm, and his father had a second-hand Ford so Billy one day asked permission to drive it.

"Sure, kid, I don't mind giving you a lesson," said his father.

Taken out on a little-used road, Billy proved not to need any lesson. To his father's surprise, he just moved over behind the wheel, started her up and drove it home. But Mr. Gable refused to let him drive it to school even on days when he was not using it.

The youngster, who at sixteen was almost as big as his father, had completed his sophomore year at Hopedale. He hated the new school, where he knew nobody but dreaded what his parents would say if he left.

Ever since he was a small boy he'd been telling his family that he was going to be a physician when he grew up. He'd had this ambition

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since he was eight. That summer he was run over by a farm wagon and had to have a deep gash in his head sewed up. This gave him his first chance to see for himself what was inside the physician's little black bag. His Aunt Mary Ella had told him, on being questioned about where babies came from, that the doctor brought them in his black bag.

At eight he had begun to doubt that. But what he saw when the bag was opened fascinated him far more than babies. The vials holding every kind of medicine, the stethoscope, plasters, rolls of bandages, the curiously shaped knives and scissors, intrigued him. For weeks afterwards he could talk of little else. Jennie finally got a history of medicine from the library, and read it with him.

After the accident he was sick only once, with the measles. Aside from that he had no further personal contact with the medical profession. But everywhere he went he heard grown-ups talking about what wonderful things the doctor had done for people: getting up in the middle of the night to treat some poverty-stricken consumptive miner who never could pay him, bringing babies into the world, always there when needed.

Learning of the many years schooling needed to become a doctor was a great shock. But studying medicine remained his ambition long after he was an established Hollywood star. It was the endless chores at the new school that disheartened him about going on with his education.

At Hopedale he had been one of the gang. The teachers who'd known him all his life made allowance for his shortcomings as a student.

But there was none of that at Edinburg High School.

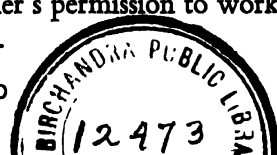
Actually, his appearance at Edinburg had created breathless interest and endless gossip among the girls. But Billy was still too shy even to be aware of that. He felt at ease with boys, and those at Edinburg had their own cliques.

A few weeks after his first term started, Will Gable came into the kitchen one day and found Billy loafing. "Why aren't you in school, kid?" he demanded.

"I'm not going to ride on that bus every day with a lot of kids half my size."

Young Mr. Gable's formal education ended that way, in November, 1917.

That Christmas he asked his father's permission to work again as a water boy at a mine near Hopedale.



A DREAM TURNS INTO A NIGHTMARE

"They're paying five dollars a day for that now," he said.

Will agreed, though with no great enthusiasm. After Billy had been gone a week or so his father got a letter from him, saying, "You're talking about buying a new Ford and turning in your old one. Would you sell the old one to me for \$175, which is what you paid for it? With my savings and what I'm earning I'll have the money when I get home."

"Sure," his father wrote, "that sounds like a good deal all around."

But even having a car of his own did not seem to make him content on the farm. During the next few months he corresponded regularly with his Hopedale friend, Andy Means. One day early in 1918 Billy rushed up to his father in great excitement. He waved Andy's latest letter. Andy wanted him to go to Akron. The wartime boom in the rubber city was continuing. Andy was sure they both could get jobs that paid big money in one of the plants there.

But his father put his foot down. "What do you want to go to Akron for, son? Haven't you a good home here? Anyway, you are too young to be running off alone."

The argument about this continued for weeks. Billy hopefully kept showing his father newspaper cuttings which described the phenomenal growth that was causing Akron to be called "the rubber capital of the world". His father kept his foot down until Jennie interceded. Eventually she was able to talk Will into letting the lad go.

Andy had come from Hopedale the night before so that they could catch an early morning train to Akron, which was fifteen miles from Ravenna.

Jennie made the usual huge breakfast that morning. As the three men ate she put a half-dozen sandwiches, also fruit and cake, into separate shoe boxes for the boys to take on their great adventure. Andy and Will Gable waited in the kitchen while she went with Billy to his room to help him pack.

When she had finished putting in everything he would need in Akron, Billy flashed her a nervous look. Then he went to a drawer and took out the straight razor he had bought against the day he would have to use it. He ran a hand over the down on his cheek. The day was not yet.

"Just for show, Ma," he explained sheepishly.

At the station, saying good-bye, Jennie cried a little. She managed to whisper, "Whenever you get tired of it, Billy, don't be ashamed to come back."

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His father shook hands glumly with Andy Means and then with his son. "We all have to learn, kid," he said, "and, believe me, you'll be home in a week."

"Akron," Gable often said later, "was the biggest place I'd ever seen. At that time the population was two hundred thousand. Andy Means and I arrived with our straw suitcases and the big boxes of food my mother had made up for us. As we walked through the streets it seemed to me that the two hundred thousand people were all out on the street that day."

At that moment the rubber capital was literally bursting at its seams. It was spreading all over the landscape, across the rivers, absorbing outlying towns, building new plants, expanding old ones.

Post-war-time demands for rubber, development of a pneumatic tyre for trucks, new uses for rubber, a local plant for constructing dirigibles, had caused the Goodyear, Firestone, Miller and Goodrich companies to dispatch labour scouts over the South for Negro help, and to Kentucky, Tennessee and West Virginia for hillbillies. With promises of big money and the gay city life, they had lured an army of men willing to sleep up to nine in a room.

Billy got a job at the Firestone Steel Products plant as a clerk in the timekeeping department at \$95 a month. Later, he was assigned to work with a surveying crew there. In 1920 he shifted to the Miller Rubber Company.

Though he had relatives in Akron, he lodged at the home of a pharmacist named Lewis J. Grether, 24 Steiner Avenue. He and Mr. Grether became friends and often went fishing together. Andy got a job moulding treads on tyres at the rim plant and rented a room next door to the Grethers.

As in high school, girls were attracted to Billy, but he remained so shy that they considered him unfriendly. Andy, who was older, kept making double dates for his friend, but he soon stopped that. Gable himself explained it differently, "I never had any full-fledged romances in my youth because I never had time for them. I was always trying to stay one jump ahead of the breadline in the early days—and in some of the later ones. You can't be romantically inclined when all your effort is being put into getting a job or holding one."

A few months after he and Andy arrived in Akron no one could buy a job there. Two-thirds of the rubber-plant workers were laid off due to a sudden collapse in the market. This was part of the post-World War I depression, but the boom town was hit harder than most

A DREAM TURNS INTO A NIGHTMARE

American communities because it was still expanding when bad times came.

Andy Means went home, but Billy preferred to stay on. For a short while he tried to support himself by working part time at Gates and Kittle's clothing store.

But business quickly fell off in the clothing store, and Mr. Kittle had to lay off his new part-time man among others. Jennie visited him every week or so. She came loaded down with home-made biscuits and cookies, jelly and a whole fried chicken. Billy kept telling his step-mother he was doing well. To convince her he would only nibble at the food while she was there, explaining that he had just eaten. Then, after seeing her on the train, he would race back to his room and gulp down every morsel she had brought.

One of the most persistent stories about Gable is that he took night pre-medical courses at the University of Akron. In fact *Who's Who in America*, from the early thirties until 1960 when he died, continued to state that Gable was "E. [for educated] at University of Akron".

G. A. Hagerman, the university's registrar, declares, however, "We would be very happy to claim Mr. Gable as an alumnus, but I find no record of his ever having attended the University of Akron."

One evening Gable and Andy went to the Akron Music Hall to see the Pauline McLean Players, a stock company. The attraction was *The Bird of Paradise*.

If that was the first show he'd ever seen, it is little wonder that he fell in love with show business and never recovered. For eight years *The Bird of Paradise* had been coining money. It possessed everything to set a lonely and naïve young man dreaming.

In addition to a good plot *The Bird of Paradise* had catchy music and the sort of hula-hula dances that drive sane men mad. It opened up to the wonderstruck Gable an enchanted world, the sort he wanted and needed to live in.

Every night after that he hung around the Music Hall's stage door to see the actors and actresses come out. One evening he followed two of them. They went into a cheap restaurant. As though bewitched he went in, too, and ordered a cup of coffee just to sit near them, watch their gestures and facial expressions, hear what they were talking about. They were good-looking young actors, but to him they were much more, creatures who lived in another and more beautiful world.

One rainy night he waited in the restaurant instead of on the street, hoping they would come in. The place was crowded that night and

the two actors sat down at his table. Billy got into a conversation with them. He could hardly believe he was really and truly talking to two of the men he had seen on the stage. When they learned how interested he was in show business, they invited him to come backstage on the following evening. And the next night he saw the show from the wings!

When the curtain came down, they introduced him to the others in the troupe, including Miss McLean herself, and her husband, Ed Clark Lilley, who was also her leading man and managed the troupe.

From that night Billy hung around the theatre every possible moment. Before long Lilley gave him the job of callboy. "I can't pay you anything, young fellow," he said, "but if you want to learn this business, being a callboy isn't too bad a way to start."

According to Gable he did a wonderful job as callboy. "I got the people out in time for the curtain whether they liked it or not, rustling rouge, sandwiches and cigarettes for them." And eventually Lilley rewarded the efficient callboy by letting him walk on the stage and say, "Your cab has come, madame."

Gable always said, "I thought I'd be scared to death. I thought I'd die as I waited to go on. When I didn't fall on my face, I thought I was an actor. It was all over then."

Many years later Lilley was interviewed by Kenneth Nichols of the *Akron Beacon-Journal*. On that occasion the manager of the Pauline McLean players could not recall having hired Gable as a callboy. "He just hung around the theatre all the time," said the actor-manager. "I did let him go on once. He was carrying a spear or something like that."

Gable, it is true, did not learn much about acting at the Akron Music Hall. But he did learn that the true children of the theatre possess an unquenchable gaiety and joyfulness, are game in adversity, and never lose faith that their luck will turn some day if they only hold on. He learned also that they are the salt of the earth and generously share whatever they have. They rewarded him for running their errands with whatever change and sandwiches they could afford. When his money ran out, they got the night watchman to let him sleep backstage.

Indeed, as Gable said, it was all over—except for the years of heart-breaking struggle ahead, the long bruising years of heartbreak and hunger and black despair. It is difficult to think of another top-rank romantic actor who knew defeat for so long as he did or who began with so little training or natural aptitude.

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The fame, luck and big money didn't come to Clark Gable until he was thirty, which is the age at which most romantic actors have seen their best days and are about to start down the short hill to oblivion.

And as sweet to remember as his childhood was, thanks to Jennie Dunlap, there was a menace to his future in it. Manhood can be very difficult for so spoiled a child. Such a child can expect too much from the people he meets. Almost frightening is his faith that somehow, somewhere, he will meet another woman like his mother to love and cherish him.

Billy Gable was to keep on looking for another Jennie Dunlap for most of his life. The fantastic thing is that he found one along the way—but by that time he had become tough-hearted enough to let her go.

It was inevitable, of course, that his parents should learn of what he was doing in Akron. On her visits there, with loads of good things to eat, Jennie suspected that he had lost his job. But she thought it best to wait for him to confide in her.

Billy found that beyond him. He was afraid she would urge him to come home and that he'd agree, and never be able to get away again.

On one of Billy's visits to Ravenna his father said, "I hear things are bad in Akron. I read in the paper that thousands and thousands of men have been laid off in the rubber plants. How about you? How is it that the Miller people never laid you off?"

Billy gulped and told him the truth. His father was bewildered to learn that his husky son had been working for nothing in the hope of becoming an actor.

"And all of this time," he said in disgust, "you could have been helping me on this farm. Don't you realize it will be yours some day, kid?"

Billy said, "I know—but I don't like working on a farm. So I'll never be much good at it."

The next day he went back to being volunteer callboy of the Pauline McLean players. It was rough going, not getting enough to eat half of the time. One of his father's sisters lived in Akron. She was married to a prosperous jeweller and would have been happy to have him in her home, but it was typical of Billy Gable, who liked to pull his own weight, to prefer going hungry to being supported by a relative. One day he got a telegram from his father that said: HURRY HOME YOUR MOTHER VERY SICK.

On reaching the farm, one look at Jennie made Billy's heart almost

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stop. They drove her to a hospital. The doctors there, after examining her, shook their heads.

"Take her home, Mr. Gable," they told Will. "There is nothing we can do for her."

"How long can she live?" Billy asked tensely.

The doctor looked at the gangling, six-foot youngster at his side. The boy seemed in agony.

"That I can't tell you. All we know is that her disease is incurable."

After that, Billy managed to scrape up the fare to come home each week to see Jennie. In January, two months after they'd taken her to the hospital, she died.

Jennie's last wish was that her old pastor in Hopedale should officiate at her final rites. Billy drove to get him, and Aunt Mary Ella Dunlap, and Jennie's two brothers, Uncle John and Uncle Edson. After the funeral he drove them home again.

He was glad of the delay, for he dreaded facing his father. And though it was late at night when he got back, his father was sitting up waiting for him.

Through half the night father and son sat in the cold, empty farmhouse, occasionally stealing glances at each other, but saying nothing. Those two who looked so much alike, who possessed the same extraordinary physical strength and solid, honest character, could never have understood each other if they lived together for a thousand years.

They went to bed, and in the morning had breakfast together. When it was time for his son to go, Will Gable said, "I guess I'll sell this place, lock, stock and barrel."

He did not ask Billy to stay on with him. The boy was glad, for he would have stayed and he knew it would have been no good. With Jennie gone they would have argued more than ever.

When he got back to Akron, he headed straight for the enchanted stage door of the Music Hall.

It took Will Gable until spring to sell the house and farm. With plenty of money in his pocket he headed for the Oklahoma oil fields. But he stopped at Akron for a couple of days to try and talk some sense into his son.

"I stopped off at Akron on my way to Tulsa," he later wrote John Dunlap. "We had our picture taken together. And we shot a lot of pool. As you'll recall, that was one game I always could beat him at."

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But he did not mention how furious he was at Billy's insistence on wasting his time hanging around the theatre—and without getting paid—in the hope of being allowed to walk on the stage and say a few words that meant nothing at all to anyone else.

Late in the summer Billy wrote to his father that he would come to see him. He arrived in Oklahoma in September and announced that he would like to learn his father's trade, tool dressing. He did not mention that bad business in Akron had forced the Pauline McLean Players to cut their season short and move on to Canton. Or that Mr. Lilley had not invited him to join the troupe. Will Gable preferred to believe that his son had put behind him the nonsensical idea of becoming an actor, and he asked no questions.

He warned Billy he would have to learn his way around an oil well before he took him on as an assistant. Meanwhile, Billy worked at whatever he could find to do. But living costs were high in Oklahoma and for a while his father had to support him.

The one job of the several the twenty-year-old found that he liked was as a garage mechanic. Billy enjoyed nothing better than getting under a broken-down hack and working on it until it ran like a brand-new machine fresh off the assembly line.

After a few weeks, unfortunately, the garage went out of business. Billy next tried his hand behind the counter of a Tulsa clothing store where he was expected to do the bookkeeping also. That lasted only another few weeks.

His father, meanwhile, had gone to Bigheart. Billy joined him there. He worked in an oil refinery, another job which he could describe years afterwards with fiery eloquence.

"A terrific heat," he explained, "is created inside those stills. Every so often we emptied them. There's a certain amount of deposit, like asphalt, that settles in the bottom of those stills. You have to go in there and take that out. They let the boilers cool for twelve hours. You can stay in there for about two minutes. In two minutes, if you don't come out, they go in and drag you out. In a gang of eight men you start work every sixteen minutes. We cleaned out storage tanks, too. You go in with a pick and shovel and they tie a rope around you. One man would go in at a time. I don't know how they work it now, but then we'd work until we felt faint: it wasn't very long before you'd go hysterical. It was a very small manhole—very small. I've seen lots of them in there get a little hysterical. They'd start to laugh. Then they'd haul 'em out."

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Gable became annoyed whenever press agents tried to get him to make his experiences in the oil fields seem glamorous. He said that the only happy moment he enjoyed there was when he left. The oil boom town was filthy, noisy day and night, and stank of oil and horse dung. Much of the time he slept in a tent with a dozen oil-smeared men, though later he and his father got themselves a shanty on the edge of town.

Oil flares flamed all night, chains clanked, and the wells made obscene sucking and pumping noises around the clock. The lure of quick money attracted riffraff of all kinds from all over the country: crooked gamblers, con men, cut-throats, sluggers, sneak thieves. Battered and shapeless old whores, loaded down with the diseases that are their trade's occupational hazards, did a riproaring business in cribs, tents, shanties, the back seats of cars. Bootleggers selling drinks that would wreck the stomach of a mountain goat also flourished.

Every few weeks Billy Gable travelled for a change to Pawhuska, though it was little different from Bigheart. He also played baseball on Saturday afternoons. One night one of the other boomers told Will Gable. "You should have been out at the ball game today."

"Why?"

"That boy of yours played in the outfield. Once he hit the ball hard enough to go right through a cow half a mile away."

Though the young fellow loathed the place, the work, the foul-mouthed, dirty, ignorant men he worked and lived with, he became a physical giant during the months he was swinging that sixteen-pound sledge-hammer. When he arrived he had been a skinny, sickly, underfed six-footer. He weighed only 165 pounds. By the time he left he weighed 205, though he had not an ounce of fat on him. His arms, wrists, ankles, thighs, and neck had all become huge. He was now what his father and Grandfather Gable had in turn been called, a "massive man".

Some weeks before he turned twenty-one Billy grew increasingly restless. His Grandfather Hershelman had died the year before and left him \$300, which he would be entitled to claim on February 1, 1922, his twenty-first birthday. He figured that this, with the money he had saved, would be enough to keep him alive at least until he got a stage job.

The unpleasant part was in telling his father he was leaving. Will Gable flew into a rage. When he calmed down, he asked, "What are you going to do, kid?"

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"I want to be an actor."

"Don't be crazy, kid. Haven't you had your bellyful of working for nothing? If you don't like the oil business, I'll buy you a haberdashery store or any kind of business you would like to have down here."

Billy shook his head.

"You know I have the money to back you up, don't you?"

Billy nodded. His father had been doing well. Besides working as a tool dresser, he'd been renting out oil-drilling equipment to other boomers.

"Why not let me buy a business for you then? Wouldn't that be better than working with a lot of damn fool clowns who powder and paint up their faces every night like a bunch of women?"

Gable did not care to repeat what they'd said to one another in their fury. He left Bigheart without saying good-bye to his father.

For many years after that the two stubborn Dutchmen neither wrote to one another nor communicated directly in any other way. Five years later Will Gable was in San Angelo, Texas, which is about 100 miles from Houston, where his son played stock that whole winter. He did not go to see him. When a friend asked him why, Will said, "A hundred miles is a long way to go just to see a show, ain't it?"

On February 1, 1922, a day never to be forgotten by Billy Gable, he was in Meadville, collecting his \$300 legacy at the office of Register and Recorder, Crawford County, Pennsylvania. From there he went to Akron. But the Pauline McLean Players had not returned. A showman he talked to suggested he try his luck in Kansas City, which was then the jumping-off place for the dozen of stock companies and tent shows which trouped through the Middle West.

Like most actors, Clark Gable was fuzzy about dates, names and stretches of time in his past. He never had a personal press agent but the studio he worked for had them and it was not their policy to understate the facts about a star or not to supply whole new sets of "facts". Between Gable's memory lapses and their fiction certain experiences of the star have been romanticized and dramatized past all recognition. And a perfect example is the troupe which Gable is supposed to have joined in Kansas City. The story of this, published times beyond counting, relates that he was with the company, a tent show, for two years; that it was called the Jewell Stock Players and that its scintillating leading lady, a forty-five-year-old Bernhardt, had only one eye, having lost the other in a fencing duel on the stage.

But if he was on such a tour it lasted not two years but two months

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or less. The Jewell Stock Players was not its name but the name another company which he played with in the Northwest later that year.

And if there was any such middle-aged one-eyed leading lady she has remained unknown to Equity, the staff of Mr. Roy Roberts's *Kansas City Star*, and to that city's old-time showmen who were much around and up and doing before and during the early twenties. *

"Our memories might not be all they once were," said one of these ageing Midwest Belascos, "but who in God's name could forget any one-eyed leading lady even if when we saw her she was down to reciting 'The Kid's Last Fight' in some two-dollar slutttery?"

The story, as Gable was quoted telling it, went this way:

"Those two years with the tent show gave me a break young actors do not get these days. I was paid only ten dollars a week. Even so I think they gave me the job only because they needed someone with a strong back to do the heavy work."

This included functioning as stagehand, prop boy and callboy, valeting the horses, driving in the stakes, taking down the tent, setting up and taking down the seats and playing the cornet on the street in a band composed of the other troupers. This was to whip up, if possible, the passionate interest of the townsfolk in *Are You a Mason?*, *The Bells*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Rich Man*, *Poor Man*, *Camille*, *Still Waters Run Deep*—or whatever other classic they were putting on that night. If a college was near by, they played Shakespeare.

The cornet playing was the only part of the trouper's life Gable did not enjoy. He once complained to Dorothy Kilgallen, the columnist, "That was the most God-awful thing. We used to climb into old clown suits and stand on the corner, playing 'Marching Through Georgia' to get them in."

Another story he told often is far more interesting. This had him going with the other troupers through the sleet and the snow to the railway station. The die was cast, as far as he was concerned. He told himself he would never go back to the oil fields, or to run a store in some little town in Oklahoma if he starved for it. Admitting to his father that he had failed would be too humiliating.

Turning up his coat collar he walked out on the platform. Just then a caboose rolled by. A hobo muttered to him.

"There's an ice box coming through later," he said. "She'll stop here for water."

"What's an ice box?" Gable asked.

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"Refrigerator train, pardner, she's rolling straight for Portland." Gable's knees were knocking and his empty stomach was flapping. But when the icebox pulled out of Butte, he was on it. It was a fast train.

But every car was sealed. Gable had to hang on as best he could, lying flat on top of the car. He had never been so cold in his life. He only got down when he reached Bend, Oregon. He was all but frozen to death after travelling more than 300 miles. He found a flophouse, fell into a bed, didn't wake until late in the next afternoon.

"I was young and just plain scared," he said. "You're always scared the first half-dozen times you find yourself broke. Later you just feel interested in what is going to lift you out of it *this* time."

Wandering around the town he saw a sign outside an employment office advertising for able-bodied lumberjacks. He applied for the job. When he got it, he asked for 25 cents in advance and bought himself a meal. In the woods his partner on a two-man saw was a giant Swede who was on piecework. Gable was working by the hour and tried to slow down. The Swede wanted to go faster—and won.

At the beginning of May, Billy Gable came out of the woods. He was broke but got a job in Bend with the Brooks Hanlon Lumber Company. His working partner was another gigantic Swede. This one was six feet four and looked about five feet wide. This man Thorsen also worked hard and forced Billy to do the same. The job was piling up green lumber. Thorsen and the others wore leather gloves or pads, but Gable had none.

Gable afterwards said, "I'd tie into that rough, heavy lumber, and it was like grabbing sandpaper." One day his hands began to bleed and Thorsen said contemptuously, "I think you've been verking inside too mooch."

At the end of two weeks his hands were as tough as any prize-fighter's. By then he had saved enough money to buy a decent suit and move on to Portland, where he hoped to get back into show business. While looking around he got a job selling ties in Meier and Frank's Department Store.

Seen in retrospect, the life of every theatrical celebrity seems crammed with coincidences which turn out to be pivotal turning-points in his career. They walk down the right Broadway side street and are accosted by a distraught producer whose leading man has just run off with his wife. That sort of thing. A handsome and distinguished-looking young man was working at the moment behind the same

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counter. He was Earl Larimore, who a few years later became the leading man of the Theatre Guild.

While stealing a smoke in the men's room the twa tie salesmen one day started talking about their theatrical ambitions. Larimore, then twenty-three, was much better trained and equipped than Billy. He had recently graduated from Oregon State, where he had acted in and directed several productions. His family had been in the theatre for generations. One of his aunts was Laura Hope Crews, the Broadway character actress who had been playing important roles for twenty years.

Since leaving college Larimore had become leading man and director of the Red Lantern Players, a little theatre group which was at the moment playing the farce comedy *Nothing But the Truth*. When he heard that Billy had played a walk-on part in Akron and had been with a tent show, he invited him to the Red Lantern.

One day Kirk McKean, an honest Scot who owned a theatre in Astoria, a town at the mouth of the Columbia River, called at the store to talk with Earl Larimore. He and a partner had completed plans to start a stock company in Astoria with Larimore as leading man.

"Can I direct?" Larimore asked.

Mr. McKean said he had already engaged a director, one Rex Jewell, but thought that Mr. Jewell would not object to having Larimore direct some of the productions.

After McKean left, Gable confessed he had been listening in.

"Are you going to take his proposition, Earl?" he asked.

"Why not?" Larimore asked. "It's a start. I certainly do not intend to spend the rest of my life selling ties."

"Neither do I," said Billy Gable. "What about taking me along to—what did he say the place was?"

"Astoria," Larimore replied, and promised, "I'll do my best."

At one of the first tryouts for candidates for the new company Billy Gable saw a girl who embodied all the charm and grace, gentility and sweetness any woman could have.

Billy Gable falls in Love

A SIXTY-TWO-YEAR-OLD woman who looks no more than forty lives these days in a small house on a hill close by the sea.

Her name is Franz Dorfler and she is the first woman Clark Gable fell in love with and wanted to marry.

Though that romance ended forty years ago, Miss Dorfler glows whenever she thinks about it. Her untroubled hazel eyes and her whole face light up with the enchanted smile one usually finds only on young faces. Franz Dorfler has had a dozen proposals of marriage since Gable jilted her, and has turned them all down. Two of the three wives who divorced him and many of his mistresses also never married or took another lover after he left them.

A general misconception about Clark Gable, and one often published, is that he was never involved in a scandal. A truth far more intriguing is that none of the women he loved and left turned vengeful or vindictive afterwards.

For years Hollywood said, "Gable doesn't marry his women! They marry him." Also, "No woman ever walked out on Gable. He walks out on them."

Gable could be a blunt-spoken man. He seldom hesitated to tell a woman when he was tired of her. What was the magic spell that Clark Gable cast over these women? It was not money. He was anything but generous with his presents. It does not seem to have been an extraordinary degree of sexual potency. Some of his women say it was quite the contrary.

That wise and witty Hollywood playwright, Charles Lederer, says,

"Gable's first wife, Josephine Dillon, invented him." Though she certainly was one of the chief architects, two of the women who came before her and several afterwards contributed heavily to the "invention" of Clark Gable.

The potential they discovered and developed, of course, was there from the start. Even so, "invention" does not seem too strong a word.

You can start at almost any point in the first two-thirds of Clark Gable's career, and you will find some woman or other building him up trait by trait, characteristic by characteristic. But the animalistic sex appeal, the amiability and winning ways which he began with, he retained as he was moulded by Jenny Dunlap, Franz Dorfner, Josephine Dillon, his first wife, Ria Langham, the second, and Carole Lombard. If Josephine taught him to act, Ria polished his manners and taught him, as his friends still put it, "how to use a knife and fork". Carole, the third wife and the only woman under thirty he married, taught him what rapture there could be in a love relationship.

This man who seemed so rocklike and unswerving in purpose had a perfect genius for adaptability, for changing and improving his personality if it suited him. He continued fitting on new traits, characteristics, manners and habits almost as though they were clothes. But once he had a wardrobe for his personality that suited him, he had the good sense never to change it.

His amazing metamorphosis began towards the end of his mooncalf romance with Franz Dorfner. Franz Dorfner (she was then performing under her real name, Frances Doerfler) first noticed Billy Gable at the Red Lantern during the tryouts for the Astoria Stock Company venture.

Billy Gable, strong and able, was graciously offering a drink of refreshing root beer to another candidate for the *ingénue* job that Franz was trying to get. When this other young woman, a Portland society girl, was eliminated, Mr. Gable lost no time in asking the winner whether *she* would not like a refreshing glass of root beer. Franz shook her head haughtily.

"Perhaps then, Miss Doerfler, I can walk you home tonight."

Franz again declined. But he contrived to leave the playhouse when she did, and walked her home anyway. From that evening on he behaved as though she were his girl, doing everything that the mature Clark Gable would have avoided; exhibiting fits of jealousy when another male, whether child, young man or octogenarian, so much as spoke to her when his back was turned. He boasted, made up a glamor-

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his history for himself, talked of his dreams and ambitions. On his travels he had met, he said, a brilliant, worldly man who had greatly impressed him and whom he intended to make his model.

Despite his sophomoric behaviour, Gable even in those days had something that drew certain women to him. First of all there was that raw, exciting sex appeal of his. And even when he was behaving like a club-headed yokel fresh from the farm, he was also considerate, tender in his relaxed moments, almost courtly in his manner. Within days of their first meeting he confessed to Franz that he loved her as no man had loved a woman from the beginning of time. In no time he was also hinting darkly that he would do away with himself, or at least vanish mysteriously, if she threw him over.

Franz was a year or two older than he, but she'd never had so intense an admirer. She found it most agreeable indeed to have a virile youth jealously sighing and mooning over her and questioning her suspiciously about what she'd been doing since their last meeting twenty-one and a half hours before. He concentrated his attention on her, studied her as though she were some rare and beautiful flower, listened to every word she said as though she was full of the wisdom of the ages. Before she knew what was happening, she was in love with him.

He was awed when she was accepted as *ingénue* of the Astoria Stock Company after reading only a few lines to McKean, Jewell and Earl Larimore.

Mr. Gable, unfortunately, made less of an impression on the management. Mr. Jewell, who was conducting the tryouts, winces even now when he recalls Billy Gable's readings.

"I had not the slightest desire to add him to the company," says this first professional appraiser of the Gable talents. "He seemed to me to lack the slightest gift for the stage with nothing, absolutely nothing to offer either then or in the future. If anyone had suggested that Gable would one day be a great film star, I would have regarded him as either joking or mentally unbalanced."

As departure time approached, Gable started behaving as though the end of the world was at hand. Franz went to Rex Jewell and begged him to give Billy a chance. So did Earl Larimore, who had become Billy's bosom friend. The director, who intended to play some roles himself, was reluctant, to put it mildly.

"In the end we took him along," Mr. Jewell says, "but only because it seemed to mean so much to Franz Dorfler. By that time she and Billy

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Gable were in love. Naturally, she wanted him to be with her. But this was nothing compared to his desire to be with her. I have rarely, in fact, seen a more lovesick young puppy."

Billy was jubilant and one bright day in July the company sailed for Astoria aboard the old stern-wheeler, the *Bailey Gatzert*.

The ride down the twisting, winding Columbia River gave them the delightful sensation of being surprised again and again. It was as though Nature was unveiling for the first time vistas of intricately carved stone skyscrapers and acres of tall forests through which Arthurian mists wander in and out. Along the way the old stern-wheeler would stop at some little river town. Sometimes it would take on but a single passenger or a small parcel. And it was as though the ship was stopping to pay its respects to an old friend that the rest of the world had forgotten.

In the early twenties, as Stewart Holbrook has pointed out, an era was passing, but travellers on such old-fashioned steamboats could still "see river towns without railroads or modern roads which looked the same as they must have to bearded travellers carrying carpetbags in the days when the river dominated everything and settlements were located accordingly".

Along with the illusion of discovering unexplored natural wonders the little troupe of ten actors, all young, were on fire with excitement over embarking on a venture that might provide a glittering new chapter in the history of show business.

But no one aboard was more exhilarated than the two young couples who sat, holding hands, near the stern. That sterling young actor-director, Earl Larimore, was with his leading lady, Peggy Martin. The novice Billy Gable, with Franz Dorfner, was as happy as a monkey. Not only was he with her but he was sure he was on his way to becoming a full-time eating actor. In lieu of large salaries, the canny Scot, Kirk McKean, and his partner had arranged to house the troupe at a large hotel and feed them three times a day—all on credit.

Astoria, the town at the mouth of the river where they were headed, had been settled by a party of John Jacob Astor's fur hunters back in 1811. The British seized it in 1813 and gave it back five years later. In 1821 the town burned down and was abandoned by all but a few pioneers who preferred living in the charred ruins to going back to their wives. Fifteen years after that Old Cinderville, as local wags called it, was immortalized by having a book written about it by Washington Irving.

BILLY GABLE FALLS IN LOVE

In 1922, Astoria had a population of 15,000, more than half of whom were Finns who made their living by fishing and lumbering. There had not been a show in the Astoria Theatre for many months. The promoters felt sure the culture-hungry Finns would flock to see theirs. If they had inquired into the town's history they might have lost their enthusiasm.

Even when Astoria was a bustling, booming centre all sorts of come-ons had failed to lure the thrifty Finns into spending money. In the eighteen-sixties a versatile showman named John Jacks had operated Liberty Hall simultaneously as a theatre, a dance hall, a burlesque house, a restaurant and a meat market. If you tired of standing vertically at a bar downstairs you could obtain horizontal hospitality from the girls upstairs.

Even so, Mr. Jacks had a hard time finding patrons willing to pay fifty cents admission. In the end he became so desperate he accepted salmon of marketable size. The salmon were dropped into a large tank and later sold by the pound to a local cannery.

Sad to say, this supermarket of indoor sports burned to the ground in a second conflagration which was called "the big fire".

On the boat Earl Larimore heard that at least 5,000 of the Finns living in Astoria had the same name: John Johnson. Lazy customs officials, unable to spell the Finns' names on their entry papers, were responsible.

Larimore told Gable and the two girls, "Our success, kids, is assured. We can fill the theatre at least three nights a week by holding John Johnson contests. On Monday we will give a ten-dollar gold piece to the oldest John Johnson present, on Wednesday to the youngest, on Friday to the fattest."

Everybody was enthusiastic except the backers.

The first show was *It Can't be Done*, a farce. This was William Collier's hit *Nothing But the Truth* with the title changed to avoid paying royalties.

A large audience turned up for the opening night. And half of those present had paid to get in. Everything went along well until the middle of the first act, when the lights in the theatre went out. After a moment or two, a few adult delinquents started booing and hissing. Noises of chairs being smashed could be heard at both ends of the balcony.

Kirk McKean, carrying a candle, ventured out on the stage and pleaded for the audience's indulgence. To keep them quiet for the moment he did a spirited imitation of Harry Lauder, the Scots comedian.

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By the time he was finished an oil lamp had been found and this was put on the stage. But the people again showed signs of becoming restless. *In fact one woman in the rear of the orchestra suddenly screamed, "Put on the lights back here! I'm being raped."*

During the next two evenings there were near sell-outs. Unfortunately, Mr. McKean and his partner, who was a hot-headed Irishman, had begun quarrelling. The Scot had heard a rumour that the blackout on opening night was not entirely accidental, but a warning from the Astoria Light and Power Company to pay a much overdue bill.

"Some warning," groaned Kirk McKean. 'It's like being hit over the head with the lectern for yawning in church.' He asked his partner why he hadn't paid the bill. The partner refused to explain and did not show up next day. On going to the theatre safe, Mr. McKean found out why. His partner had taken every cent of the receipts. When last seen he was heading for the Canadian border.

Oblivious to everything except one another, Billy Gable and Franz Dorfler had been spending their afternoons exploring the water front. She had never lived in a seaport and Billy had never seen one. They had the double thrill of seeing life and living dangerously as they wandered along, looking into the tattoo parlours, dance halls and speakeasies. Holding hands, they peered into the windows of curio shops that were crowded with the queer things sailors had brought back from far-off places—bits of jade, Hawaiian dolls, carved ivory statues of Buddha, stuffed birds, the floating glass balls Japanese fishermen use in the deep sea. They stood on the wharves and watched the salmon fishermen coming in with their catch.

But the best part of each day came when they climbed to the top of Coxcomb Hill. From the hill they could see across the river, which is six miles wide there, and also the waters of the Pacific shimmering in the sunshine as they talked about how good it was to be alive and to have found each other.

Being in this idyllic state, it was a doubly shattering blow to come home one day and find their fellow troupers worrying about where their next meal was coming from. Mr. McKean had been there to report that his perfidious partner had stripped him of all cash assets.

"Someone tipped off the restaurant owner," Larimore explained mournfully, "for he immediately shut off our credit. The owner of this hotel says we can stay here for at least the next week. But McKean can't pay any of us.

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"He says that if we want to continue strictly on a co-operative basis, he'll work out a deal. Everybody has agreed but George Lanigan. He says *he is going home*."

Larimore smiled at Gable. "There's good news for you anyway, Billy. Rex Jewell wants you to take over the parts Lanigan was supposed to play in next week's show."

Billy Gable seemed overwhelmed. "Parts?" he asked hoarsely. "Did you say *parts*?"

"Yes, but maybe you'll be working without getting anything to eat."

"Who is going to worry about that? Not me, not this week! But," he asked, "what do you mean—*parts*?"

Larimore explained that they were putting on one-act versions of three plays—*Are You a Mason?* a farce; *Dregs*, a grim drama laid in a tenement on New York's Bowery; *And the Villain Still Pursued Her*, a take-off on the old melodrama of that name. It was hoped that this theatrical delicatessen would please Astorians on all levels of culture and refinement.

After Mr. Jewell found out that he would have to use Gable, he told his wife, "I'm going to like *Are You a Mason?* best of the three. In that one Gable cannot do too much damage. He has only a walk-on part."

It was in the other two acts that Mr. Jewell feared Billy would wreak havoc. In *Dregs* Billy was cast as a detective. In *And the Villain Still Pursued Her* he played Alphonso Dressitcase, "the dying baby of a deserted wife".

Next morning he was up at six, rehearsing. As soon as he dared, he woke up Franz and hurried her off to the top of Coxcomb Hill to read with him. Her heart ached for him. Now that his chance had come he was shaking like a man in terror, could hardly hold the pages in his hands. And as the tense afternoon wore on, he perspired so that the backs of his hands were drenched and drops of sweat kept running off his fingers. Unfortunately, Billy's fears and Mr. Jewell's proved only too well founded.

On making his entrance as the detective in *Dregs*, he bumped against a chair and fell on his face. The heartless audience applauded like mad as he got up, brushed himself off and continued his performance.

Franz, who was watching from the wings, burst into tears. Rex Jewell announced his intention of firing Billy in the morning.

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"Why not tonight, my dear?" asked his wife, Rita Cordero, who was playing Billy's mother, Gladys Dressuitcase, in the final exhibit.

"I can't face him. If I have to talk to him tonight, I'll strangle him."

"Maybe you won't have to talk to him in the morning, or ever," she said. "I wouldn't be surprised if he ran away rather than face you."

But she was underestimating Billy. Playing the six-foot-long baby in *And the Villain Still Pursued Her*, he was so good that the audience howled at his antics. After the curtain came down, Franz did her best to cheer him up. "You were real funny as the baby," she kept saying.

"The trouble is that I was also funny as the detective," he retorted disconsolately.

But by noon the next day he was his old determined self again. And Mr. Jewell did not fire him. For that morning the director had been summoned from his bed by Mr. McKean.

"More bad news, I suppose," Mr. Jewell said on arriving at Mr. McKean's office in the theatre.

By way of answer, Mr. McKean introduced a large, menacing-looking gentleman who was seated at his side. "Meet the sheriff of Clatsop County," he said.

"Delighted," said Mr. Jewell in an unconvincing tone.

The sheriff said the owner of the Oceanic Spray Restaurant had requested him to supervise the handling of all moneys in the box office until his bill was paid in full. To make it official, he read the bill, which listed the large amounts of clam chowder, salmon steaks, hamburgers, French-fried potatoes and apple pie, cheese and coffee the troupe had eaten before credit was cut off.

"Anything else, Sheriff?" Mr. Jewell demanded crisply.

"Yes, there is, now that you mention it. If one of your actors leaves town before the bill is paid, I am going to put the rest of you in jail and hold you there until my brother's bill is paid."

"Your brother's bill?"

"Yes," the sheriff said affably. "He owns the Oceanic Spray Restaurant. I do all his collecting for him."

Despite this and other harassments, the troupe somehow kept going. Mrs. Jewell helped by cooking meals for the company. The trouble was that she had little to serve but salmon which kindhearted fishermen gave them daily. One evening Mr. Jewell was given a baby sturgeon weighing sixteen pounds. Mrs. Jewell cooked this in onions and tomatoes according to an old Spanish recipe.

She, too, had a hearty appetite, but she did not eat the sturgeon.

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While bending over the stew she saw in the pot what she thought was a large worm. She pointed it out to her husband, but he insisted, "It's just gristle from the sturgeon's backbone."

"Well, you can eat it," she said. "I've lost my appetite."

Franz meanwhile kept pointing out that Billy Gable's work was improving steadily. They were playing two shows a week and Billy was in all of them. In *When Women Rule* he appeared as Eliza Goober, the Negro cook; in *Corinne of the Circus* he was Dr. Thorney, the village doctor; in *Blundering Billy* he appeared as Hank Dibble. He had requested a change in billing to "William Gable", which Franz considered more dignified than Billy.

"What do you mean 'he is improving'?" Mr. Jewell asked Franz once. "You are right if you mean that he hasn't fallen down since that first night. Now he only stammers, staggers and stumbles all over the stage."

The whole project was also staggering and stumbling.

The first week each performer got \$10 on the share-and-share-alike deal. The next payday they got \$6.70. The next production was *Mr. Bob*, in which William Gable played Obidia Dawson, his uncle from apan.

This show appealed to so few Astorians that each actor was handed only \$1.30 that week. Even the stage-struck William Gable agreed at that point that they had better give up. In a little speech to the heart-broken players, Mr. Jewell spoke of his hope of reorganizing them a little later into a company that would travel up-river, playing the towns on both shores all the way to Portland.

He asked them all to remain in the area for a week or two longer. "Our vehicle," he said, "will be *Corinne of the Circus*, the most spectacular of all the shows we've played here."

With one exception, the actors all agreed to wait and go with the show up the river. The exception was Mr. Charles C. Chinn, who said he was going back to Portland if he had to swim there. Mr. Jewell said he understood. But he did it with nods. The news deprived him of the power of speech. All he could think of was that now he might have to give Billy Gable a bigger part in the play than he'd intended.

Eating was less of a problem to Franz than to the others. An aunt of hers, who was divorced and had no children of her own, lived in Astoria. The aunt had been begging her to move into her home since the troupe arrived. But Franz preferred to remain on her own and also to be with Billy as much as possible. However, when her salary dived

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to a few dollars a week she had little choice, and moved into the aunt's house.

But even in this most desperate time their love affair flourished. In fact, they became engaged. Franz wrote her family that she was about to marry Mr. William C. Gable, an actor, but gave no details. The Doerflers lived on a farm near Silverton, Oregon, and she doubted whether they would either understand or approve.

Though he remained brave and cheerful most of the time, Billy did suffer fits of depression and despair. He would explain at such moments, "I haven't a friend in the world." She had told him of her parents, her four brothers and two sisters, and he would cry, "I don't know what it is to have a family like yours. I am alone in the world, absolutely alone."

But such outbursts were rare and she attributed them to his getting too little to eat.

In the midst of all these difficulties Lucille Schumann, a young actress who shared character parts with Rita Cordero, persuaded her mother, who had a summer place at Seaside, a beach resort only ten miles away, to invite the two ever-loving couples, Billy and Franz, Earl Larimore and Peggy Martin, to stay with her until they heard from Mr. Jewell. Mrs. Schumann had been appalled on learning of the poor financing of the troupe.

"Such impractical people!" she exclaimed.

But she herself turned out to be an impractical hostess. When the four arrived they found she had invited so many other guests that the boys had to sleep in the barn. The next day more guests arrived who so overcrowded the barn's sleeping accommodations that Earl and Billy started sleeping on the beach. The day after that, additional friends rolled up. Peggy and Franz, feeling in the way, said they would not mind too much sleeping on the beach also.

After that the four of them slept each night next to a blazing wood fire, and got their meals at the Schumann beach house when Lucille's mother remembered to order enough food for her small army of guests. Once again hunger was upon the young actors. Earl and Billy fished and dug clams while dreaming of steak.

At the beach the youths got along well despite the inconvenient living conditions. Gable hated the rain. One day, when they were caught in a downpour, he lost his temper. Larimore told him to stop making such a fuss over a mere Oregon mist.

"Oregon mist!" exclaimed Gable, who was soaked to the skin. "This is what any sane man would call a heavy rainstorm."

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The girls had to come between them to prevent a fist fight. Gable's temper did not improve after they made the run from the beach to the Schumann front porch. They had the great good luck to get there just as Mrs. Schumann was discovering she had run out of firewood.

Undernourished though he was, Billy Gable was huskier than Larimore. "Please, Billy," said Mrs. Schumann, "go out to the backyard and chop up that big log for me."

"In this rain?" Gable asked, peering out at the downpour. It was not until Mrs. Schumann promised to pay him fifty cents that he agreed. He used the half-dollar to buy frankfurters which they roasted later at the beach.

Beach days for the foursome ended one afternoon when Mr. Jewell telephoned that he had completed his plans for his river tour. He was waiting in Astoria for them to join him.

When they reached Astoria, Larimore found a letter from his aunt, Laura Hope Crews. She had arranged for him to join the Jessie Bonstelle Stock Company, one of the best training troupes for actors in the country, and urged him to leave for New York at once. Peggy Martin was heartbroken, and Mr. Jewell felt almost as bad. Losing Larimore meant that he had to make a dreadful choice. He could give up the tour, after bookings and financing had been arranged, or hand Larimore's role of Joseph Amrocio Jones to Gable, the least promising actor he had ever seen. There was no one else young and good-looking enough available.

Despite the desertion the troupe started out with high hopes. Billy Gable regarded his promotion as a giant step forward. Two nights out of Astoria he learned something about women that he had not known before. After the show that evening Peggy Martin ran into his dressing-room. She was half dressed. "I'm so lonely," she said, throwing her arms around him. "I can't live without love."

"Sorry," he said, as he slipped away, "but my girl is waiting for me."

Mr. Jewell, after each evening's performance, had to rush off to the next town on their schedule. He had mailed ahead lantern slides advertising his attraction and had made certain other arrangements. But he had to be his own advance man and make sure that everything—tickets, posters, programmes, the hall itself, the house props and scenery—would be ready when the actors arrived next day.

Mr. Jewell insists that his actors rode on the *Bailey Gatzert* and other

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fashionable stern-wheelers as they followed their crisscross route to towns on both the Washington and Oregon shores of the river. But that is not the way Miss Dorfler recalls it. To save money, she says, the company travelled on milk boats which were designed purely for utility, like mud scows. They had no cabins, but had bells which rang melodiously whenever the vessels stopped to pick up the tin cans of milk left at designated points by each farmer along the shore.

The nights on the river were cold, and unable to keep warm, Billy shook and shivered. This frightened him. He had told Franz about his mother dying of epilepsy and was afraid he had inherited her disease. They took turns trying to sleep on the bench along the milk boat's railing. He would insist on Franz's taking first turn and would put his topcoat over her. Later she would walk the deck and let him try to sleep. But the bells which rang so often made getting more than a few winks impossible. Besides the low fare, passengers got all the free milk they could drink.

Tiring of the almost exclusive milk diet, Billy once cried, "My God, I've never had to drink so much milk since I was a baby."

Franz invited him one day to visit her folks' farm when the tour ended. The thought of how her mother would enjoy feeding him steak, roast beef, lamb, ham, vegetables and pies made her smile. Her mother would like Billy very much, she was sure. But Franz was not to sure of what her father, brothers and sisters would think of Billy.

The tour of the Columbia River towns opened at Grange Hall, Waluski, Oregon.

Mr. Jewell's handbills promised "clowns, a bareback rider, sword swallower, snake charmer, ringmaster, etc." At Clatskanie, the admission prices were fifty cents for adults, twenty-five cents for children. The theatre operator, knowing his public, played it safe by throwing into the bargain "eight reels of motion pictures".

But business was poor. Mr. Jewell, a never-say-die showman, kept trying all sorts of stunts to pull in the crowds. At Ilwaco, Washington, a place with practically 100 per cent Finnish population, he bought the cast huge Finnish hats and costumes, for the show. In other towns he offered the audience the privilege of dancing on the stage after the show. Elsewhere he got the good-hearted local ladies to serve free refreshments. The actors did not mind at all when large crowds didn't show up on those nights, for it meant they could eat almost all the bologna and liverwurst sandwiches themselves.

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At Cathlamet, Billy Gable again committed an unforgivable theatrical sin. As he was playing his big scene in which Corinne dies in the arms of Joseph Amrocia Jones, a half-dozen lumberjacks stomped into the theatre in hobnail boots.

Fearing that his words of love would not be heard by the audience, Billy stopped politely until they found seats for themselves. His farewell to the dying Corinne was not heard anyway. The audience became hilarious at seeing him halt the show and when he did try to tell Corinne that he would love her just as much after she was dead as when she was alive, their mirthful howls drowned out his lines.

The valiant impresario staked his all at Kelso, where he had booked his show for a two-night stand. Unfortunately, in Kelso the poor little troupe found a town where all hell had broken loose some time before. Jealous of a near-by model town, Longview, Kelso had been warring on it. The county newspapers had been roasting Longview (a clean, modern, perfectly planned, designed and run town) as though it were some municipal Typhoid Mary. Wobblies spread word that instead of being a workers' paradise, Longview was the dream city of the slave-driving bosses who built it. Libel suits and the murder of an editor had followed. A day before the troupe arrived, a mob had broken into a Kelso church and had locked out the pastor.

With such melodrama available all over town free, practically nobody in Kelso cared to pay good money to see *Corinne of the Circus*. So the actors who had started out so bravely for Astoria six weeks before, returned to Portland bankrupt and even hungrier than when they left.

Back on the Farm

NEEDLESS to say, the arrival of Franz's actor-fiancé was awaited by the Doerfler family with misgivings. They were prosperous farming folk with cultural interests of their own. They all sang. The three girls played the piano. An uncle of Franz's had studied at the Vienna Conservatory of Music, and her sister Margaret was a gifted painter. Her pastel seascapes later won first prize at the Oregon State Fair three years in a row. *

But Martin Doerfler and his wife did not consider as one of the great arts the sort of acting Franz had been able to do in road company musicals.

Franz had always been lovable and vivacious. But when very small she had also been looked upon as the clown of the family. Instead of learning cooking, preserving and the other home-making arts she spent all her time reading plays, reciting, and putting on shows in the barn, causing her mother to tell her often, "I got my first grey hairs the day you were born." Her father appealed to her to "stop being a rainbow chaser".

The young men of the neighbourhood came around in droves. Franz treated them as some great lady might so many clodhopping oafs. When her puzzled father asked her what she found wrong with these sons of his neighbours and friends, she told him, "They bore me to death with their everlasting talk about crops and weather and barn dances."

"What do you want them to talk about, Frances—Shakespeare?"

"Yes, Papa."

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In the end, he reluctantly consented to her to going off to Portland to seek a stage job. Mr. Doerfler made her promise not to drag his name in the mud by using it. She was billed as Frances Relfreod (Doerfler spelled backwards) in her first job in the chorus line of a musical. Her brothers saw this and teased her about being in a leg show. She shortened her first name to Franz when she found herself in a show with four other girls named Frances.

When she returned to the farm for a summer vacation her father heaved a sigh of relief. His daughter had not taken to dope or drink, and obviously was not going to become a white slave in San Francisco's Chinatown. He even consented to her using the family name. She dropped the first "e" when the most brilliant dramatic critics in the Golden West proved unable to spell Doerfler correctly. Her recent letters in which she tried to explain away the financial catastrophes that had wrecked the great Astoria adventure only confirmed, of course, her father's idea that she was "a rainbow chaser".

The whole family expected Billy to be a ragged, broken-spirited ham. Instead, it was a jaunty dandy who got off the train with Franz. He sported an expensive gold watch, imported English shoes, a shirt with French cuffs, a five-dollar cravat and carried a Gladstone bag that was a beauty. It was true that his tweed suit was a bit worn and shabby, but it had obviously cost a lot when new. It was later that they learned this was his only suit, that he had only one other shirt and that his fine feathers had been bought at Meier and Frank's at the usual employee's discount.

But by that time his high spirits and friendliness had them enchanted to the point where they were as worried as Franz about his yellow colour and whether he was getting enough to eat. "He was a glowing light there on the farm as in every gathering," she says. "There was that wonderful dimpled smile, his infectious laughter, a desire to please and to entertain. They were a little taken aback, of course, because he called my mother Mom and my sisters hon and sweetheart from the moment he met them. But it did not take them long to accept the idea that we were going to be married. From then on, they all adored him, even while being troubled by something sad and appealing in his eyes."

To Billy it was like being at Grandfather Gable's place back in Pennsylvania once more. The Doerfler farm covered hundreds of acres. So many rhododendron plants and flowers grew all over the place that it looked like a park. There were orchards of fruit trees—apple, peach, pear, plum—and black, red and yellow berries were

everywhere. There were fine horses on the farm, a dozen cows, pigs, chickens.

The house was a big one and built for comfort, with a huge kitchen, big living- and dining-rooms downstairs, and upstairs the bedrooms Mr. Doerfler had kept adding gradually as his family grew.

Their worries about his getting enough to eat did not last long. Billy ate like a horse and between meals gambolled like a happy young colt with Franz and her two young brothers.

What he appeared to enjoy most of all was putting on an old shirt and a pair of jeans belonging to one of the older boys. Then he would wander with Franz and the two younger boys over the fields and meadows and into the woods. They'd explore, climb trees, race one another. Gable did not drink in those days, or hunt. When Franz's brothers suggested a day of hunting or fishing, he'd just shake his head.

To Mrs. Doerfler, he seemed just a big, overgrown schoolboy. Sometimes he would spend hours sitting in the kitchen watching her and Franz's sisters cooking food. He would say nothing at all, just sit there staring thoughtfully at them, taking it all in, apparently fascinated in watching Mrs. Doerfler baste a roast, knead dough for the home-made bread, shell peas, clean lettuce, peel potatoes, bake the bread and pies and cookies.

Occasionally Mrs. Doerfler complained to Franz that she found it disconcerting to work under the watchful eyes of her son-in-law-to-be. Then she would add, "But he's such a nice young man, a pleasure to have around."

Gable was then neither handsome nor impressive-looking. But Bertha told Franz, "He's cute, charming, and I love that space between his two upper front teeth." Superstitious people had a name for that: "The liar's gap", but the Doerflers didn't know that.

Billy even then was able to make each person he met feel important by giving him his whole-hearted attention. And then there were his childlike antics, such as pushing out his upper bridge with his tongue, or abruptly doing an imitation of Lon Chaney as Quasimodo in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Muttering fiendish cries and shrieking like nothing human, he would make Bertha scream with fright as he chased her through all the rooms upstairs and down. Sometimes he would sit next to Bertha on the piano stool and sing popular songs while the whole family joined in. Billy's favourite was Victor Herbert's "Sweethearts". But no ballad was too sentimental or maudlin for his taste—"My

Buddy", "I Found a Rose in the Devil's Garden", "Broadway Rose", and best of all, "Old Pal, Why Don't You Answer Me?" He also liked to sing snappier numbers such as "When My Baby Smiles at Me", "Ma, He's Making Eyes at Me!" and "The Sheik of Araby".

Most startling of all to the Doerflers was his uninhibited attitude towards Franz. At any time, without warning, he would seize her in a bearlike grip and kiss her madly again and again and again. They did not know what to say or do in the presence of these obviously sincere expressions of affection. He also had no embarrassment when he talked exuberantly about his feelings for Franz. "I think she's the most wonderful girl that ever lived, Mom," he would tell Mrs. Doerfler, and sometimes he would add, "Mom, Franz and I are going to have two children, a boy and a girl."

"What makes you sure?" Mrs. Doerfler would ask, teasingly.

"Just made up my mind, ma'am," Gable would tell her, laughing. "Argue all you want for two boys or two girls, but I'll not change my order."

Though quickly accepting him as a member of the family, Franz's parents could not help puzzling over his failure to make any plans for supporting her and those two darling little children they kept talking of having. Neither of the older Doerflers found it easy to ask questions. For that matter, both of the young ones seemed too bedazzled with one another to discuss so mundane a matter.

The Doerflers did respect Billy's eagerness to work at anything at all for whatever wages he could get. Three weeks after they arrived he went off with Franz and Bertha and an aunt to pick hops at the vast Livesly Ranch, near Independence, Oregon.

During the short hop season pickers who lived near the ranch went home each evening. But the Doerflers and others, who came from some distance away, brought their own bedding, food, cooking utensils. There were many discomforts. They had to sleep in their own tents or in community shacks. Nights were cold, and washing was done out of a bucket. They got up at four-thirty in the morning and worked until dusk in hot, dusty fields. Yellow jackets, mosquitoes and other hungry, buzzing, biting pests were with them day and night and had to be beaten off.

They studied Shakespeare together from a one-volume edition Franz had brought along. She had a grammar also and gave him lessons. She told him he'd never succeed on the stage unless his grammar improved.

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Billy whooped loudly when he saw the two books. "I'm going to prefer the Shakespeare. I don't think that grammar is going to give me enough scope for my acting ability."

As a hop picker he was so inefficient that he was given a job driving a couple of mules. The boss told him, "Don't let these mules fool you because they look so dumb. They are just as dumb as they look except about one thing: who's boss. If you let them get into their thick skulls the idea they're running the business you'll not be able to whip them out of it."

Billy held them in line as he drove the team around the fields picking up the tall bags filled with the hops the workers stripped from the trellised vines.

Even in this unromantic atmosphere Billy remained a gallant cavalier. Each day at lunchtime he would leap from his perch behind the mules as though from a gold coach. He'd take Franz in his arms, squeeze her hard and cover her dust-smearred cheeks with rapturous kisses. He couldn't have been much more affectionate had he just come back from Morocco. After eating cheese and bologna sandwiches with the girls and their Aunt Pauline, he would wipe his mouth, embrace Franz and wildly kiss her a dozen times more before returning to his mules. Each time he passed he would throw kisses to the delighted young woman.

Even Aunt Pauline, who had a droll sense of humour and no illusions about men, was impressed. "You're one girl who will never have to worry about losing her man."

And no one could have been more solicitous a couple of days later when Franz contracted tonsillitis and couldn't work. He got iodine and insisted on swabbing her throat with it several times a day. She was touched, but several years later a physician informed her that nothing can damage one's voice much more than applications of undiluted iodine which Young Dr. Gable had prescribed. When she recovered, she continued his grammar lessons. They also read scenes from *Romeo and Juliet* while the others slept.

The hop picking lasted three weeks. They were back on the farm only a few days when Billy and Fritz Doerfler got jobs with a surveying party which was working in the Sitka spruce and cedar country near the Coast. Billy's principal job was carrying chains for the surveyors. He'd go up to a mountain-top in the morning, carrying the chains, and come down at night. When they got back after five weeks, he told Franz. "They kept telling me to look at the beautiful

view. But it rained all the time and was too foggy. However, I bought postcards of the area, just to make sure I'd recognize it next time and get away from there fast."

He and Fritz got another tough job, working with a construction gang. Billy's job was swamping, which meant going ahead of the railroad gang, cutting and clearing the brush.

"There was so much rain *there*," he told Franz on his return, "that I thought I would be back on those mountains again any minute." He got poisoned by an evil weed, Oregonians, aptly called the "Devil's Walking Cane". The tough construction men told him to ignore it, but Fritz insisted on getting a doctor to treat it.

"I don't mind that so much," Billy said, "but, hon, you won't believe it when I tell you that some of those highly sensitive working stiffs didn't appreciate my singing. There I was flat on my back, and trying to cheer them up with some Southern songs; you know, 'Mammy', and 'Rockabye Your Baby with a Dixie Melody'. But one fellow who said he was from down in old Mississippi got into an uproar. He tied right into me, said what did I mean singing Negro songs? So I said, 'Okay, friend, I'll sing a white man's song for you.' And you won't believe it. I sang 'While We Were Marching Through Georgia', and he didn't like that either."

Franz laughed. But then she told him of overhearing a conversation between her mother and Aunt Pauline that had upset her.

"What in the world do you suppose they expect to live on, Pauline?" her mother had said. "In all my life I have never known a sweeter, more considerate boy than Billy. But how can they think of marrying? They haven't a penny! He hasn't even got a steady job."

Billy Gable was not too impressed. "We love each other, don't we, hon?" he said. •

"Of course, but—"

"That's all that is necessary now. The problem of how we are going to support ourselves will be solved in due time."

"But we haven't enough right now to pay for the wedding licence," she cried.

"Just leave everything to me, hon," he told her, patting her shoulder as though she were a child.

Not knowing what else to do, Franz left it to him.

That winter he got a job at a lumber yard in Silverton seven miles

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away, and saw her only at weekends. Sometimes he could not hitch a ride and would walk the whole seven miles. He would come up to find her swinging on the gate, waiting eagerly for him.

The big fellow, looking better now, not quite so sallow, would drop the flowers and the candy he had brought for her and her mother, and take her into his arms.

"Let's get married," he would whisper. "Please, Franz, let's not wait one more day. I can't stand it any longer without you."

It would always be the same. She would try to calm him, comfort him, get him to be reasonable, see things in a sensible light. But it was not easy—for she wanted to be married as much as he, perhaps more.

"I'll make you happy," he would promise. "Don't you believe that?"

She would say she did believe it—but since overhearing that talk between her mother and aunt in the garden she was cautious. She realized that her elders were right: they must have something to start with before they could think of marrying and bringing children into the world.

In Silverton, Billy Gable talked much about his girl down on the farm. He had her pictures on the walls, and on the dresser of his room in his boarding-house, Cottage Hotel. He carried a snapshot of Franz in his wallet. Mrs. Charity Scott, who ran the place, and her four teen-age children were for ever being asked to look at Franz's picture and listen to his boasts of what a wonderful actress she was and what a wonderful girl.

But it was for other reasons that the lonely, love-smitten young man created a sensation on his first day in Silverton at Mrs. Scott's breakfast table and the Silver Falls Lumber Company, where he had got a \$3.20-a-day job in the loading department.

He accomplished this by appearing that morning dressed in peg-topped breeches and riding boots.

"You are going down to work at the lumber yard dressed like *that*!" Mrs. Scott asked.

"Sure, why not?" Billy said with the nonchalance he had so admired in Earl Larimore.

"You better get your week's board money in advance, Mrs. Scott," remarked one of her older boarders. "Them big Swedes down at the yard will think he's one of them gentleman jockeys whose pictures you see in the Sunday papers. They'll put him on one of their saw-horses and ride him right out of town."

Billy laughed with the others—and ate his usual hearty breakfast. But even though he expected to be showered with additional ridicule at the lumber yard he was taken aback by his reception there. The foreman stared at him incredulously, then introduced him to Ole Peterson, an old hand there. Peterson took one look at the new man he was expected to work with. Then he put on his coat, asked for his pay and announced he was going out to get drunk.

The foreman assigned Al Johnson, a less sensitive Scandinavian, to break in the newcomer. After he and Gable had moved a few thousand feet of heavy lumber to a waiting truck, he asked Bill Bevins, the driver, where his merry-go-round was.

"What merry-go-round?" Bevins asked.

"The one my partner here was to ride on," said Johnson.

Bevins and his helper laughed and slapped their knees. Gable looked from one to another, and then exploded into wild laughter himself.

"I do look like a clown, I guess," he said. But he would have died before admitting that the riding outfit was the only thing he had to wear except for his one tweed suit. It was the riding outfit he had worn for his role in *Corinne of the Circus* and Mr. Jewell had let him have it after the show turned up its toes in Portland.

Like every actor, Gable went through a youthful period when he enjoyed making people laugh regardless of whether they laughed at him or with him. The one thing he could not endure was being ignored. At noon when he and the rest of the men retired to a tin shed with their lunch buckets Billy would put on his daytime show. This consisted of take-offs of whole gangs of solemn Swedes and Norwegians. Two or three of them didn't like to have their speech, gestures and other eccentricities mocked in that way. But most of them were both flattered and amused. That he could get away with imitations of these fellow workers was a tribute to his infectious good humor. They were big, dignified men who usually lost their tempers when anyone else made fun of them.

Occasionally Al Johnson lost his temper with Gable because his young partner kept making jokes in Scandinavian dialect even while they were carrying heavy pieces of lumber.

"He's a good workman, that young fellow," Al told the foreman, "even if he is trying some new monkeyshines all the time, making those funny faces and noises."

At Mrs. Scott's, Billy did his imitations at the table, sang songs in the parlour, or on the porch while strumming a ukelele. The other

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boarders called him "the ham actor". The older ones complained that the uproar prevented them from reading the evening paper. But when he was late for dinner they were first to ask, "Don't we get no free show tonight from the ham actor?"

Gable went each week with Louyse and Wilbur Scott to the dance at the National Guard Armory. Being an out-of-towner and a dashing young fellow he was a standout, but invariably he preferred to ask the wallflowers for the next number, instead of the prettier girls.

He would carry the plain-looking girl off to the floor, treating her as though she were a beauty. When Wilbur kidded Billy about being the dream prince of the wallflowers, Gable just smiled.

"I know what it is to be lonely," he said. "Another thing, the pretty girls—most of them—bore me stiff. They're spoiled and vain—I find these homely girls easier to talk to and they don't act as though they're doing you a favour by dancing with you."

"What about that girl, that Franz Dorfler, you're always talking about?" Wilbur said one day. "I've seen her pictures in your room. She's pretty—does she act like she's doing you a favour by dancing with you?"

"No. But she's the only pretty girl in the world like that."

"The only one in the world?"

Billy laughed. "The only one like that I've met. They just make one girl like that, I guess, and then they break the mould."

In November Franz decided to take singing lessons in Portland, and moved to the home of a married brother who lived there. It was as easy for Billy to visit her in Portland as at the farm, and he continued seeing her every week-end. But she was not there long before Rex Jewell offered her a job with *Jewell's Comedians*, a musical show he was taking on tour through the Northwest.

When Franz told Billy that she was going out of town for months he behaved as though she'd announced the end of the world.

"Don't you realize what this means!" he demanded. "We'll be separated at Christmas!"

"What can I do?" she asked. "If I am ever going to get anywhere as an actress I can't pass up whatever chances come my way."

"Will you write a letter to me every day?" he asked in a forlorn voice.

Franz promised that she would. As she kissed him good-bye she told him, "Don't forget. They'll be expecting you at the farm on Christmas morning, just as they would if I were there."

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Franz kept her promise to write him daily, and sometimes she would get two or three letters from him that he'd written on the same day. They were filled with complaint of how lonely he was without her. But during the week before Christmas he received no letters from her at all, and became frantic.

On Christmas morning he surprised the Doerflers by arriving at the farmhouse in a new pinstripe blue suit which had cost him \$90. But it was with a glum air that he distributed his gifts and accepted those bought for him. He told Franz's mother he simply could not understand why he had not received any letters from Franz. Mrs. Doerfler asked him if he hadn't read in the newspapers about the terrible snowstorms raging in Idaho where her troupe was playing. Nobody in the family had heard from Franz all week.

But Billy appeared to think Franz could have got a letter through to him if she really wished to.

"I guess she's found someone else," he kept saying in a mournful tone. In an effort to cheer him up, Bertha sat down at the piano, pulled him down on the stool next to her, and asked him to sing something. Billy said he'd like to sing "Old Pal, Why Don't You Answer Me?" The words of this melancholy ballad told of the anguish of a man whose loved one had died and gone to heaven. Billy said it expressed pretty well how he felt, and in a heartbroken voice he sang the song.

On January 17, less than a month later, Billy left his job at the lumber yard and moved to Portland. Four days later he had a job soliciting want ads by telephone for the *Portland Oregonian*. He left this in March, worked in a garage and took other odd jobs. Meanwhile he was studying with Lawrence Woodfrin, a voice teacher whom Franz had recommended. By June Mr. Woodfrin thought Billy had progressed far enough to give a Sunday night concert at the Portland Hotel.

Billy was particularly delighted because Franz had written she would be able to be there. She had to come that week anyway to attend her sister Bertha's wedding.

She was in the audience on the great day that Billy sang to a crowded room. Most of the audience were old ladies who seldom missed these free musical treats. They applauded all of his numbers, but particularly liked "Mother Machree" and "Mighty Lak a Rose". Franz felt as though her heart would burst with pride as she watched him charm the old ladies with his fine baritone.

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Though his job prevented him from attending Bertha's wedding, the couple spent every other possible moment together. This time, when he asked, "When are we going to get married?" she told him, "By the end of the year."

"Have I your word on that?"

"Yes."

Though miserable over her insistence to rejoin the troupe, he promised he would try to be patient until she came back. That October he became a timekeeper for the Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company. He disliked the indoor work, and was relieved when he was given a job installing telephones.

One of the most popular legends about Gable is that he first met Josephine Dillon when he put in the phone at the acting school and theatre she had just opened on Eleventh Street, in Portland.

The truth is more ironic. A friend in Portland had told Franz about the little theatre and she passed on the word to Billy and urged him to seek an appointment with Miss Dillon.

Josephine was one of the three talented daughters of the late Judge Henry Clay Dillon, who had been a distinguished jurist and prosecutor in Los Angeles. Josephine, a descendant of an old California family, had majored in French at Stanford, then studied in Italy for a year under Mottino, the famous Italian teacher of stage acting. One of her sisters, Enrica, had made her debut as an opera singer in Italy. Fannie Dillon, her other sister, was a composer of note. Josephine had appeared on Broadway and for a year had been leading lady of Edward Everett Horton's stock company. But teaching acting was what she loved best and now had decided was her real vocation.

The moment this perceptive teacher saw and talked to Billy Gable she realized that he possessed great fire, animal magnetism, the will to succeed, and most of all, a unique personality that could make him a great performer. She realized also that he knew nothing whatever about acting. What she didn't know was whether he was teachable. After she listened to him talking about his ambition she told him the truth as she saw it. His first task would be to forget all of the eye-catching, attention-getting tricks he'd picked up, and start again from the beginning. Then he would have to acquire perfect body control. Not only control of his eyes, gestures and voice. He must also learn how to use his hands, his arms, his legs, an eyebrow or one finger, an elbow or a knee to convey a thought to an audience. His body was an instrument which he, as a stage craftsman, must master.

Miss Dillon gave him hope for his future. She explained that he was starting out with the rarest of all theatrical talents: the magic which, intelligently handled and trained, could make the hearts of audiences beat a little faster, and sometimes turn over; the power to make them laugh and cry.

But he was starting late in life and what he still had to learn would take many years of schooling. It would take years, she repeated, years when studying under her must remain to him the only important thing in the world. Miss Dillon did not neglect to point out that even if he followed her instructions faithfully, it was still a gamble. She could only guarantee that if and when luck came his way, he would be able to make the most of it.

"Think it over for a long time, my young friend," she told him. He looked at her, a small, plump woman with the kindest brown eyes he had ever seen. Her quiet voice gave her such grace and dignity and strength that just hearing it made his whole body throb and tremble.

Gable said impulsively it was unnecessary for him to think the matter over. He was eager to start at once. He had heard enough to be willing to put his future in her hands. And he would go through with it until she was satisfied.

But she shook her head, smiled, and told the overeager young man that it was too important a decision for him to make so impulsively. Almost beside himself with excitement, Gable wrote of all this to Franz. She couldn't have been happier. It was wonderful news, she said in her letter.

His second interview with Miss Dillon forced him to calm down a bit. "I'm ready right now," he told her. "When can I take my first lesson? Tonight? Tomorrow?"

"The first thing you must do," she said, "is to get a leave of absence for three or four weeks from the telephone company.

"You can never become a good actor," she explained, "without a sound, healthy body. You have a fine physique but you look terribly undernourished. You must go to a ranch for a complete vacation. Don't do anything but rest, except to read a little. I'll get a doctor to prescribe a proper diet for you."

Gable was too embarrassed to explain that he had not enough money to take a leave of absence and to pay board at a ranch. But Miss Dillon, who seemed to be able to read his mind, guessed what his problem was. She offered to help him with a loan that he might pay

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back later. When he came back, he would have to take a physical culture course. Only then would she start her lessons.

The weeks on the ranch gave Billy the first vacation he'd had since his boyhood.

He thought about Franz, and understood his dilemma for the first time, and was appalled. He had begged her to marry him, forced her to set the date. But they would have to wait for years—if he were ever going to be the actor Miss Dillon said he could become in time.

She had added a whole new dimension to his conception of the acting profession. And, gamble or not, acting was the one business which promised him a chance to escape from the sickening squalor and filth he'd been living in for so long and from the threat of hunger, a chance to get away from working and living with men who talked and behaved like subhumans. But where would that leave Franz, that sweet and wonderful girl who loved him?

It was after Billy's vacation on the ranch that Franz, still on tour, began to notice that his letters were becoming less affectionate. She wrote him that she would be home for Christmas, and that they could be married then, as she had promised. She arrived late on Christmas Eve, telephoned Billy and arranged to meet him next day at her brother's house. It turned out that there were too many other guests there for the Christmas party for them to talk privately.

A snowstorm was raging outside, but she insisted on walking with him to his trolley stop. She began to tell him of the wedding plans she had made. Suddenly he interrupted her.

"I don't love you any more," he said gruffly. "I never believed this could happen to me, but I'm going to study with Miss Dillon for the next few years. Without her help, I'll never get anywhere. Working with her has come to mean everything to me."

Franz didn't answer. She couldn't. Sobbing and whimpering, she ran away from him, slipping and sliding through the snowdrifts, to her brother's house. For the next four days she could neither eat nor sleep. She burst into tears each time her brother or sister-in-law attempted to talk to her. She wanted one thing only: to die.

On New Year's Eve she heard the telephone ring. Then her mother came upstairs and into her room.

"Billy is on the phone, Frances. Do you want to talk to him?"

"Yes," she said. She ran downstairs, breathless. When she picked up the phone he was all apologies. "I don't know what in the world

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got into me the other night," he said. "I haven't been able to sleep since. When can I see you?"

"What for? Why do you want to see me?"

"I want to ask you, Franz, if you'll marry me. I didn't mean one word I said."

"I'll marry you," she told him, "whenever you want."

Shake Hands with Hollywood

WHEN Franz met Billy she received a shock. He said what she'd hoped to hear: "You know I love you, hon. When is it going to be? When are we going to be married?" But something about him was different. He had changed in some way that she did not at first understand. It was a while before she sensed what it was: all his urgency was gone, the passionate eagerness which had swept her off her feet and made it possible to believe that nothing else but love mattered. He behaved almost like a man carrying out an obligation.

Tightening her lips, she told him that she had not been able as yet to decide on a date. She hoped he would say, "Nonsense! We'll wait not another minute."

But he did not say that or anything like it. He seemed more relieved than anything else. Unable to endure it, she made some excuse to get away. She had to think. And when she was alone she told herself it was one thing for two people madly in love to marry and live in a garret. But how could a marriage survive with no money, no income, without a future set, if the man—she could hardly endure thinking it—if the man no longer even behaved like a person in love.

Before leaving for Portland, Franz telephoned a theatrical producer she knew there. She had heard he was putting on a new show. He told her he would be delighted to have her in his troupe. Now she was grateful for something to occupy her mind.

After their reunion Billy came to see her less and less often. There were difficulties, with him working by day for the telephone company

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and her nights at the theatre. And he was also spending much of his free time studying with Miss Dillon, as he explained.

But no difficulties had mattered to him last year. When she remembered how many Friday nights he had walked the seven miles from Silverton to the farm to see her she burst into tears.

When he did come to see her now, he did not seem like her Billy. He embraced and kissed her less often, seemed interested only in telling her of the great strides he was making in his studies with Miss Dillon. Together they were reading parts in *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*, as well as the good things done on Broadway recently: Eugene O'Neill's *Anna Christie* and *The Hairy Ape*; comedies like *Six Cylinder Love*.

One evening he announced he had great news for her. Miss Dillon was giving him a good part in *Miss Lulu Bett*, the next play she was putting on at her little theatre.

"Until now, hon," he told Franz, "you've had all of the ambition and the get-up-and-go. But now, thanks to Miss Dillon, I will have my chance to show what I can do. Nothing can stop me, hon."

She loved to see him so confident. What broke her heart was his failure to include her in his great plans. Billy was slipping away from her. Franz, an effervescent, gay-hearted girl, had never before known worry or heartbreak.

But now the big fellow needed her no longer. He had somebody else to read *Romeo and Juliet* with, somebody else to help keep alive the blazing fire of ambition that burned in him, making him restless and impatient, and at times moody with fear because there was so much to learn, so many obstacles ahead.

One of her worst nights came when Billy and Miss Dillon dropped in at the theatre where she was appearing. They wished to borrow some scenery.

"Miss Dillon upstaged me that evening," Franz recalled recently with a wry smile. "What was far more important was that my lover did too. That was one lesson, upstaging people, he had learned from her which he had not described to me."

Shortly after that she broke off their engagement. He made a show of being disappointed, but she was unable to deceive herself about it being anything more.

After that, to her astonishment, Billy continued to visit her at her hotel. He seemed unable to break off their relationship. Hoping against futile hope as she was, Franz found it impossible to refuse to see him. She used the ticket he sent her for *Miss Lulu Bett*. Though he had

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improved somewhat, he was still awkward on the stage. She could not see that Miss Dillon had achieved any miracle. He had not even reached a modest professional level; in her heart, she doubted that he ever would.

One thing did encourage her. He was still insanely jealous of her. She discovered this after he called to her hotel one day and found she had gone out. When she came back, after he had waited a half-hour, she was on the arm of a small, middle-aged English gentleman.

Franz introduced the two men. The Englishman was an accountant who lived in the hotel. He went to his room after shaking hands with Billy.

"Well," said Billy Gable, eyes blazing, "I'm waiting!"

"Waiting for what?"

"An explanation! What were you doing with that little insect? Don't tell me you're in love with him!"

Franz smiled, which made him angrier.

"I'm still waiting."

"He's just a nice little man," she said, "who is far from home and lonely. He takes me to tea once in a while. We talk about music."

Billy nodded as though to say "a likely story".

And Franz's hopes really soared at the beginning of summer. Josephine Dillon was closing her school and going to Hollywood. But that was only part of it. Miss Dillon had also got Billy a job with the Forrest Taylor Stock Company, the troupe Franz was working with!

However, her hopes were short-lived. He seemed to avoid her. Once or twice when they accidentally encountered one another backstage, she came close to showering him with recriminations. Each time she was just able to get back into her dressing-room before bursting into tears.

Billy remained with the company two weeks. Forrest Taylor gave him only minor roles, that of Chang Lee in *East Is West* and Harry Haydock, owner of the Bon Ton Store, in *Main Street*. In those two shows Billy had himself billed W. C. Gable.

It was so unnerving to work, with him in a dressing-room just a couple of doors away, that Franz was almost glad when he left. This, even though she knew he was going to Hollywood and would probably resume taking dramatic lessons from Miss Dillon. He was not interested, he said, in getting into films, but he'd heard many stage plays were being put on there now.

Franz remained in Portland, trying her best to forget him. But each

morning, on awaking, her first thought would be the hope that she would receive a letter from him. Sometimes she would wake up early enough to get downstairs as the morning mail was being distributed. On such days she would seat herself in a chair opposite the registration desk and watch the clerk putting the letters and postcards into the various guests' cubby-holes. Whenever the man would pop a letter into hers, Room 434, her heart would jump. It was all she could do to restrain herself from leaping up and running over there to get it. Every day there were letters for her, letters from the farm, from her aunts, from old school friends, girls who had trouped with her—but the letter she wanted never came.

When the stock company ended its season at the start of that summer, Franz went on the *Bailey Gatzert* to Astoria. She thought that it might ease her pain a little if she tried to relive some of the experiences she had enjoyed with Billy there just two years before, when she had been happy and had felt so loved.

Following the fire the town had been rebuilt. Its appearance was vastly improved, as its citizens proudly pointed out. But it was not improved for her. Gone for ever were the funny old streets where she and Billy had walked hand-in-hand. Gone was her aunt's house with the flower-filled garden where he had brushed her hair a hundred times each afternoon, bending over to kiss her neck or her cheek. Gone were the old tattoo parlours, the curio shops with the floating Japanese balls and the ships in little bottles that the old sailors had made, the carved ivory Buddhas, stuffed birds, gone the dance halls and speakeasies.

Coxcomb Hill was still there, of course, with its gaudy monument. Once more she stood there, admiring the view of the mist-wreathed river and the great sea. It seemed only yesterday that they had sat there together, while he read his part, trembling, perspiring so that the drops of sweat covered the backs of his hands and ran off the ends of his finger-tips.

She walked down to the newly built wharves. They, like half the town, had stood on wooden stilts before the fire, but were now gone. An old seafaring man was still there who had told Billy and her wonderful tales about wrecked ships and of an Indian ferryman who had charged passengers only a fishhook apiece to row them across the wide river to Chinook, the old Indian village.

"Where is that nice young gentleman friend of yours?" asked the old sailor now. "What a fine, big fellow, always smiling."

Franz could only smile, and hurry away. Would she ever, she

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wondered, know another day like the one when he brought her his spare shirt to iron? She had tried so hard to do it just right. But the worst had happened. When he came back for the shirt he found it scorched and her in tears.

"Your *only* other shirt, Billy!" she had sobbed. "And I burned it." He had smiled and taken her in his arms.

"It's nothing at all," he said.

"Nothing? The only other shirt you have in the world!"

"Just a minute!" He darted out, got a bottle of peroxide and sponged at the scorched spot which soon began to disappear. He had learned the trick from a hobo, he explained.

After two days, Franz could endure no more: She fled the town where she had first come to know the love of her life. For when could she hope to see again that man with the hair, like black satin, the beautiful eyes that could say anything and everything? That it would happen one day not too far off, and under circumstances impossible for her to imagine, only a reader of the future could have told her.

The Hollywood that Clark Gable, its future gracious king, first saw in 1924 was still in its late gold-rush stage. The film town's population had tripled in the past four years. Still rushing in from everywhere on earth were people of all ages, and every hue—would-be actors and writers, would-be directors, penniless financiers looking for their first quick dollar.

Block after block along Hollywood Boulevard were schools of photoplay writing, directing, film photography and studio management. Most of them were run by people who had never been in a studio except on a visitor's pass. Swamis, crystal-gazers, sideshow barkers, preachers who had invented new religions or with ideas of how to improve on the old ones, contributed carnival touches to the scene.

Until recently the studios, together with Hollywood's bankers, merchants and other money-mad businessmen, had been welcoming this horde of star-struck invaders with open arms. They assumed that most of the newcomers would prove to be at least solvent. However, a few months before, it had dawned on the bemused promoters of local prosperity that most of the pilgrims were broke and had no future except as public charges. They at once stopped promoting the film city as a heaven on earth where lucky novices could make from \$1,000 to \$10,000 a week.

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The keynote of their new publicity campaign was DON'T COME TO HOLLYWOOD! The 1923 report of the Travellers Aid Society, Los Angeles branch, showed why: most of the 20,000 persons who requested assistance during the year had come to Southern California to get into films.

The Hollywood Chamber of Commerce lost no time in deluging the country with other statistics. The fifty studios in or around Hollywood employed only 12,000 persons, most of whom were carpenters, electricians, prop men, porters, office help and labourers. One hundred extras were already in Hollywood for every one-day job. The industry's largest employment agency, Screen Service had registered 100,000 persons in the past six years. Of these, five became stars.

Nothing could tarnish Hollywood's glamour. Mary Pickford was paid \$10,000 a week. Hollywood had also made millionaires of poor boys like Charlie Chaplin, Harold Lloyd, Douglas Fairbanks and William S. Hart. Ramon Novarro, Anita Stewart and many another great star had started as extras. Patsy Ruth Miller and Corinne Griffith were two who had been invited to act after being seen by directors while visiting a studio. The sensational stories about sex orgies and dope parties in the film colony only increased the lure for both the lusty and the prurient.

Gable was one of the very few who came to Hollywood that year hoping to get a stage job. He arrived there, after sitting up all night in the train from Portland, with four handkerchiefs, a couple of clean shirts in his suitcase and \$2 in cash. However, before his money was gone he ran into Josephine Dillon on the street. When she learned that he had nowhere to stay, she invited him to live in her \$20-a-month bungalow while she moved to a friend's studio. Not long afterwards, Gable contracted pneumonia. Josephine nursed him through this illness. She had learned a good deal about nursing while working for the Red Cross during World War I. She had then been engaged to an Army officer who died while in the Service. She often said of this man, "His love was all I ever needed."

Less than six months after Gable arrived in Hollywood, Josephine and he were married. The date was December 13, 1924. He gave his age as twenty-four, a year older than he was; she gave hers as thirty-four.

Josephine Dillon Gable later became the teacher of other future stars: Gary Cooper, Lupe Velez, Lyda Roberti, and many another. But her training of the crude, bumbling, half-educated Gable was the masterpiece of her career.

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She was the first catalyst, the moulder and shaper of his talent and polisher of his personality. One says first because there were others who came later and helped him.

Josephine believed he had a great future as an actor when no one else did, not even the Oregon farm girl who was almost out of her head for love of him. His first wife was willing to work for him and with him, was ready to starve if necessary. She believed that to help him was worth all the suffering and physical hardships they might have to live through.

Even when they needed money desperately, she refused to let him take a job in a store or a garage or anywhere else. She reminded him that he had no time to waste, that other actors his age had finished their training. Some had put in two or three years in stock or with touring companies, or even on Broadway itself. When he mentioned his brief and dreadful experiences with the Astoria players, she smiled indulgently.

The only jobs she would consent to his doing was as an extra. She felt that in the studios he could study professional performers at work. And there was always the off-chance that some person in authority might be impressed by his electrifying personality.

This did not happen for a long time. The truth is that for years the world's favourite actor was a flop even as a Hollywood extra. Once she managed to obtain for him a tiny part in a Universal picture, *The Great Diamond Robbery*, starring Shirley Mason. The director, Denison Clift, was an old college friend of hers, but she had to write Clift three times before he instructed his assistant to "see Josephine Dillon's husband and try to fit him into some small part, if you can".

Gable did not impress Clift or anyone else at Universal. And that was one of the very few parts he got during the seven lean years before the lightning of luck converted him overnight from a nothing into the biggest man in show business.

Only the permanently bedazzled, or the dim-witted, thought of extra-work as a glamorous adventure. It was a gritty grind, frustrating, humiliating and wretchedly paid. In those days, one could seek such work at the various studios, as well as at Central Casting. The studios were scattered miles apart, from Culver City, where Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer had just been born in a sensational merger, to Universal far out in the San Fernando Valley.

Like other extras, Gable called each day at as many studios as he

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possibly could, usually travelling on foot. It was necessary to get to them early in the morning to land anything that day. And the casting offices rarely knew until late in the afternoon whether anything would be available next day. When Gable got no work, something that happened nineteen days out of twenty, he would do his best to get back to the bungalow by four o'clock so that he could telephone Central Casting and as many studios as possible.

"Here is that Gable man again," he would say in that cheerful sandpaper voice of his, "anything for me?"

Some afternoons he would have to call a studio twenty times before getting anything but a busy signal. But he was always so good-natured that the overworked casting people came to like him, and gave him what jobs they could.

In July that year *The Literary Digest* published a photograph that showed 3,500 men and women clamouring for attention outside a casting office which had given out word that thirty-five extras were needed.

The pay for ordinary extras was \$3 a day plus a box lunch. Those who worked in costumes furnished by the studios got \$7.50 a day. Dress extras, who had to bring their own evening clothes, were paid \$10.

Gable was glad when he could land even one of the \$3 jobs. Josephine remembered for years how, to save fare, he had walked the seven or eight miles home from a valley studio after one \$3 day. Whatever you were paid, being an extra was humiliating. Most of the assistant directors were rude and treated the extra mob like cattle. Those few who were not rude were always hustling so much that they had little time to worry about the extras' feelings.

On one occasion he was selected to be a \$7.50 extra because of his height. "They shoved me," he explained, "over to one side with a whole group of other men about my size. Then the assistant casting director looked us over, measured our height with a practised eye and picked out twelve of us. I felt like a show horse or something and disliked the whole business before we even reached wardrobe.

"We were to be grenadiers of the guard or something like that: a tall background for a Lubitsch spectacle. When they put uniforms with a lot of braid and huge hats on us, we did look pretty tall but felt plenty uncomfortable.

"For three days we stood without moving at the back of a stupendous set. I hated the whole thing, the standing around, the waiting,

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waiting for something to happen. But seven dollars and fifty cents rolled in each night."

Gable once got a \$10-a-day job, but had to rent his tuxedo. He was shocked when the costume company charged him \$2.50 a day for the use of the tux.

"But that's all the extra money I am getting as a dress extra," Clark protested.

"But think of the prestige," sneered the costumier.

Gable was happy later on when he became close friends with Frank Hotelling, another struggling young actor. Hotelling had a dress suit which he loaned Clark whenever Gable needed it.

After Gable became Hollywood's greatest star he never forgot what being an extra had been like. "For years," he said, "I couldn't get myself arrested in Hollywood." He always went out of his way to be courteous to the extras in his movies. Even when he was in one of his rare bad moods on the set he could not endure seeing one of them being pushed around. The assistant director who tried that never worked on another Gable picture.

Throughout his extra days Josephine helped by working at anything she could find. She read manuscripts for the Palmer Photoplay School, typed manuscripts, taught part time in schools of elocution and stage training, took on whatever private students she could find.

She also cooked, cleaned, shopped, mended his shirts, watched the bills. But she always felt that her main job was training him for greatness. Everything else could wait. In many interviews and by-lined magazine articles, and also in her book *Modern Acting*, Josephine Dillon Gable has told of the various phases of her training of Clark and also of their married life.

In these, she described how she taught him to eliminate a high-pitched, squeaky quality in his voice. She taught him to do breathing exercises as he walked. She believed this enabled him to relax the muscles not being used. In time he began to lose the look of an over-worked, undernourished man who had had to fight for everything he got. His remarkably relaxed air and facial flexibility, that smile of a man who was relaxed but had everything under control, certainly were developed through her lessons.

Josephine did start with one advantage, for the singing lessons he had taken in Portland had eliminated the "tight voice" he would have had otherwise. In *Modern Acting*, she wrote of the endless work he did while training his voice under her tutelage:

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He used to sit at the piano for long periods daily, trying first of all for pitch and for accuracy of tone, and learning to listen. Then he would work his voice down, a half step at a time, until the register of his speech was proper for the big-man type. It had to be established in quality and resonance. You can notice the results of his work in the amazing resonance behind his speech and the firmness of his tones. He had a conglomeration of vowels from East and West, from farm and city, from workmen and leisure people, and a scattering of Dutch. However, it was all virile, energetic and full of character and tone quality.

She urged him to study the work of successful actors, not in order to imitate them, but to find out how they achieved certain of their effects.

If twenty-five cents could possibly be spared from their tight weekly budget, Josephine sent him off to a neighbourhood cinema to study the performances of the screen's best actors. His favourites were all virile types—Milton Sills, Wallace and Noah Beery—and Lewis Stone, who had gone on the stage after leaving West Point. When they could spare the money, Josephine went to the cinema with him, and after the show they would sit up for hours discussing the acting they'd just seen.

Josephine also contrived to get tickets for concerts and operas so that he could hear for himself how resourcefully great singers used their voices. She liked him to hear different singers singing the same song, different concert violinists playing the same pieces, so that she could point out the points of difference in their interpretations. She took him to art galleries and, when possible, hunted down subjects painted by various artists.

Josephine also worried about whether he was getting enough exercise and encouraged him to go to the public golf links with rented or borrowed clubs because the fee there was only twenty-five cents. Later he got a cheap second-hand set himself at a Hollywood hock shop.

And she was delighted that he had found a charm in Hotaling, a tall easygoing young man. After studying architecture in college, Hotaling had decided to become an actor. She often puzzled over what the cultured Hotaling could see in her rough diamond of a young husband. Years later she wrote:

Frank would talk books and Clark would listen, Clark would talk cars and Frank would listen, or I would talk acting and they both would listen.

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In those days Gable had an inferiority complex a mile wide because he was only half educated. Josephine got him to read the biographies of such self-made Americans as Edison, Ford and Edward W. Bok, the editor, so that he could see for himself how other men had achieved greatness despite their lack of education. She also encouraged him to read novels of Dickens, Thackeray, Zola, Mark Twain, Hawthorne, and Poe's short stories. They continued reading together the plays of Shakespeare and Ibsen, and the modern playwrights. All his life Gable loved Shakespeare and, with the slightest encouragement, would recite whole acts of *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*.

As part of her training programme Josephine wangled invitations to parties and dinners at the elegant homes of old friends. There the big eyes of Clark could take in everything without seeming to. At his wife's suggestion he observed how the well-behaved men spoke, acknowledged a greeting, handed a cocktail to a lady, stood up, sat down, managed their hands. After they'd get home to the little bungalow she would make Clark imitate the well-bred gentlemen he had watched.

Many times that year, listening to Josephine read, watching her face as he reshaped one of the lines or repeated a gesture, he must have thought of Jennie Dunlap. He once told Adela Rogers St. John, "The big thing my stepmother taught me was to live in a book, in imagination. Looked like she had a dull life, but half of the time she wasn't there. She was sailing down the Mississippi with Huck Finn or trying to rub out the damned spot with Lady Macbeth. Jennie brought the first light into my life."

Franz had carried the light for a while, reading with him on Coxcomb Hill for his first roles, on the farm and at the hops shelter.

And now it was Josephine. She seemed to him a fountainhead of knowledge, a woman who gave infallible advice, and could explain exactly how he should do everything. If he later became a king, it was she, Josephine, who trained him to wear Hollywood's biggest and brightest crown, and with dignity. For among other things, she warned him not to hang around the corners of Hollywood Boulevard with other young actors who were waiting for their break.

"We're not waiting for anything," she repeatedly told him, "and we must never give that impression."

And what she meant, of course, was that he should always act as though success was a foregone conclusion. This was something he

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managed quite successfully even when he had not a dollar in his pocket or much hope.

Gable let her manage his whole life. One thing she did, though, which almost drove him wild. Josephine had an obsession about having him walk up and down stairs properly. She would keep him at it some days for hours without a break. Sometimes he became irritable at her endless instructions about how to walk. Particularly after long lessons of hers on how to talk, think, lift an eyebrow, beckon with a crooked finger, smile, shake hands, nod, wag his head, light a cigarette.

On those days he would slam out of the house in a rage and remain away for hours. He never told Josephine where he had been, or with whom. She never asked, was content when he was willing to resume their work where they had left off.

Like Franz, Josephine found him subject to black moods. It never occurred to either of these women who loved him and helped him so much that it might be his lack of money and prospects for the future that induced these fits. He was desperate through all of those early years. He wanted out of life what every person wants: money enough to live with dignity and some sense of security about the future. That he never gave up acting, that worst of the world's bad gambles, through this long and dreadful period reveals the depth of his compulsive passion to act.

Of course he had his moments of self-doubt.

Sometimes he would think of the young men who were making good just then—Ronald Colman, Richard Barthelmess, Norman Kerry, Conway Tearle, and Milton Sills. He realized he was like none of them. He would wonder also if he could ever learn enough about acting so that people would come to see him.

Everybody was raving then about the sex appeal of Rudolph Valentino. Women were almost as charmed by the boyish-looking Barthelmess and Colman, who looked mature even then, when quite young.

"Gosh, honey," Clark sometimes groaned, "I don't believe I have any of this sex appeal that you hear all the women talking about. No one follows me on the street, or sends me love letters. I don't see how I'll ever be any good as an actor."

It was during his years as an extra, by the way, that he changed his first name to Clark. That happened on the day he bought a shirt in Clark's Dollar Shirt Shop on Hollywood Boulevard.

"That's a great shirt for a dollar," he said to Josephine as they walked

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out. She looked back at the store, and remarked, "Don't you think that Clark might be a good stage name for you to use, dear?"

He thought it over for a moment.

"It is your middle name, after all."

"Clark Gable," he said. "Great. That's me. Maybe it will bring me luck."

However, Kenneth Nichols, the Akron *Beacon-Journal* columnist, offers another version of how Gable got the name which he later made so famous. After much research work, Mr. Nichols found proof that Gable was using Clark as a first name away back in his Akron days. The name "Clark Gable" is in both the 1919 and 1920 editions of the Akron City Directory. If so, Gable reverted to the use of Billy soon afterwards. He was Billy in the Astoria Theatre programmes. Franz, for one, never knew him by any other name.

In any event, the new name brought him no luck at all. The going remained tough, rough and rugged—for both of them. If living from hand-to-mouth was hard on Josephine, it was hard also on her young, grinning husband. Bad health continued to hound him. His teeth, never good, bothered him more and more. But they never had enough money to pay for proper dental work.

He was considerably troubled by indigestion. Sometimes he would go on a diet. He would eat nothing but tomatoes for days, tomatoes sliced or whole, stewed tomatoes, tomato juice, tomato and lettuce salad, tomato and lettuce sandwiches. At other times he would become convinced that oranges were the thing. Then he would eat only oranges for days, drink orange juice by the pint, ask Josephine to prepare orange and lettuce salads for him.

When not on a diet, Gable was easy to cook for. He liked best the plain foods he had been brought up on, Irish stew, fruits, all kinds of vegetables and most salads. Corn flakes and milk was his favourite at breakfast and sometimes he would again eat cereal in the afternoon and evening. All his life he was a beef-and-potatoes man. He loved chops and steaks, but while married to Josephine, they couldn't afford to buy them.

About once a week Hoteling was invited to their house for dinner. Frank had some money of his own and lived at the Hollywood Athletic Club. Occasionally, he would take the Gables to a Hungarian home restaurant. There were quite a few of these in Hollywood then, run by World War I refugees who supported themselves by serving five-course dinners in their own dining-rooms for sixty-five cents.

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These were great treats for Clark and Josephine, who could rarely afford to dine out at a frankfurter stand.

The best day of their marriage was the one when Josephine bought him a broken-down old jalopy for \$36. This sagging old crock had been standing in an alley near their bungalow for days. Its tyres were shot, stuffing popped out of the upholstery in several spots, and worst of all, no one could start it.

Josephine paid \$3 down for the jalopy and promised to pay the rest in \$3 monthly instalments. Clark found a set of secondhand tyres for \$12, and quickly managed to get the car running. Josephine cut up an old chair cover and used the pieces as patches which she sewed over the holes in the seats.

The car saved them from getting much worse cases of cabin fever in the bungalow than they already had. Clark used the car to drive around to the studios. He took Josephine shopping in it and, once a week, to Long Beach where she had pupils. On those days they would take Hotaling along, and Clark and he would go swimming while Josephine gave her lessons. Afterwards the two struggling actors would lie on the beach and talk about their prospects of making good. Hotaling was having no better luck than Clark.

"When and if I make my pile here," Gable confided to his friend more than once, "I'm going to quit. I'd like to become a doctor some day. Heidelberg, I have been told, is the finest place in the world to study medicine. That's where I'll go—the minute I can afford it."

Which shows that the old ambition of boyhood was still a dream.

On other days Clark doubted that his luck would ever change and he'd mutter to Hotaling, "If this keeps up much longer, I'll have to go back and work in the oil fields."

Having the car enabled them to get out of town occasionally. Hilda Romaine, one of Josephine's pupils, had a cabin in the mountains which she often let the Gables use at weekends. The other week-enders in the near-by cabins were workaday people and Gable felt at home among them. With the men he played that rough old Indian game, lacrosse. He had a chance to cook food out in the open, something he enjoyed all of his life.

After Gable became famous he never cared to discuss his work once he left the studio at the end of the day. But in his early days, when he was anything but sure of himself, he talked of practically nothing else. As dedicated a teacher of acting as Josephine was, she often found herself wishing he would discuss something else now and then.

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"I never knew what else beside acting went on in Clark's mind," she once wrote. She said her life with him was like that of a grade school teacher who enjoys her work with her children, but yearns at night for the company of grown-ups.

From the start of her marriage to the strapping young actor with the bedroom eyes, friends of Josephine's feared it would not last very long. One of these old friends was William Farnum, one of the greatest of the silent stars.

One day Farnum said, "Josephine, my dear, don't you realize what will happen if that big he-man of yours ever makes it big in show business?"

She looked at him quizzically. "What will happen, Bill?"

"The first thing that is going to happen is that you will lose him to a younger woman."

"That," she told him, eyes flashing, "is not inevitable."

"Possibly not. But you must know that he is the sort of fellow all women go crazy about. The moment he becomes important here or on Broadway, rich women, younger women, beautiful women, will be after him. Dozens of them. So why don't you stop teaching him how to act? Get him to go into some profession or trade where he'll not attract the attention from women an actor does. Why lose him?"

Josephine smiled and told him, "That is a risk I must take."

Her lady-killer of a husband did not visit women when he slammed out of the house in disgust at having to walk up and down stairs so much. Usually he went to see Hotaling or some other pal. Some days he would spend hours talking about cars at the neighbourhood gas station run by Roy (Red) Scovall. When he could afford to risk a dollar or two, Clark liked to play penny-ante poker there with the fellows who hung around.

Josephine suspected that Gable never explained where he had been because he was a Pennsylvania Dutchman. The husband is boss in Pennsylvania Dutch families and explains nothing to the little woman unless he feels like it. Apparently, when married to her, Clark never felt like it.

Josephine in most ways was the best wife a man could have. She herself sometimes had a premonition that she'd lose her smiling young husband one day. There was the evening they went to a movie at Grauman's Egyptian Theatre. Norma Talmadge, then the screen's most popular woman star, was in the lobby waiting for her escort to buy tickets. On this particular evening Miss Talmadge was wearing a

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beautiful sports suit and looked as bewitching as she ever did on the screen. Josephine eyed her admiringly and thought with a sigh of her own threadbare clothes.

Just then, her husband nudged her and gasped, "Look at her, honey! That's *my* idea of how a beautiful woman should look. Doesn't that stuff on her smell good, honey? How much do you suppose that kind of cologne costs?"

"I knew then," Josephine later wrote about that moment, "and I have known ever since that moment, that nothing weighs in the balance with a beautiful, warm, perfumed, exquisitely dressed, expensively groomed woman."

The mystifying thing is that the woman who eventually took her youthful husband away from her was not young at all, but older than she. And even stranger: besides the woman who took him away, there was a whole swarm of them who tried. They too were older than Josephine.

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THE first of the older women who tried to take Clark Gable was the dark, luminous Broadway star, Jane Cowl, then thirty-nine and at the height of her fame. The season before, Miss Cowl's *Romeo and Juliet* had been called "the greatest in living memory".

Miss Cowl had the features of a patrician and the determination of a Hannibal. But she wished only temporary possession of the lean and hungry-looking Gable. Men to her were playthings; if she had been a man herself she would have been called a cad.

As a child, Jane switched the usual order of things by being born in Boston and going to school in Brooklyn. After making her stage debut in 1903 (when Gable was three years old) she managed to squeeze in a couple of years of law study at Columbia University.

When young she had worked for David Belasco, and for years afterwards she was fond of displaying the bruises on her neck and shoulders she claimed he had inflicted on her during rehearsals.

While in a Belasco play that starred David Warfield, Jane decided to write a story about Warfield. She took it to the *New York Times*, got it printed and also got Adolph Klauber, that paper's dramatic critic, for a husband.

After setting a new record for consecutive performances of a Shakespeare play on Broadway, Miss Cowl triumphantly toured the country. The husband and wife team of Louis O. MacLoon and Lillian Albertson were sponsoring the show during its West Coast engagements.

On this spring day in 1925, Miss Cowl and Miss Albertson were

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sitting on the stage of a theatre waiting to inspect the ten spear carriers. Only six-footers were wanted. When Mr. MacLoon brought Gable down the aisle, Jane gasped, "Lillian! Look at that wonderful-looking young man! I want him." Lillian gave her a knowing look, causing Miss Cowl to add quickly, "I mean for the show, of course."

"I assumed that's what you meant," said Miss Albertson.

She was not much impressed by the young fellow. Though he had a fine physique and an arresting personality, he seemed awkward and his face was too gaunt. His feet and hands seemed as big as hams. Her husband put him through his paces, walking across the stage, turning, bowing and the rest, and her impression of his clumsiness increased. But the two actresses and MacLoon were agreeably surprised when they asked him to read and it turned out that he knew *Romeo and Juliet* by heart.

"What are we waiting for?" Jane Cowl demanded. "Hire him! He's the right size, isn't he?"

MacLoon gave his star an annoyed look. He intended to pay these supers \$35 a week, not a cent more.

He made Gable wait while they inspected the other candidates. Miss Cowl, usually interested in the casting of even the smallest roles, seemed lost in thought as the other aspirants were marched in.

When the ten tall youths were selected, Miss Albertson went to her office. Gable dropped in there half an hour later, looking sheepish.

He told Miss Albertson nervously, "Miss Cowl asked me to have dinner with her—" then he stopped.

Miss Albertson waited a moment, then said, "Where?"

"In her rooms."

"Why do you tell me this, Gable?"

Clark blushed. "I wanted to know if it was all right with you if I went."

"Yes, it's all right with me," she said, smiling.

"Thank you, Miss Albertson," he said.

She waited until he got to the door, and then called, "Oh, Gable."

He turned and started back.

"I just want to wish you good luck."

Gable went roaring home in the jalopy. He pumped the horn like mad as he turned into the alley next to their bungalow. When Josephine came running out, he leaped out of the car, took off his hat, swept it to the ground, and cried, "Bow, my dear, to the first What Ho! of Miss Cowl's *Romeo and Juliet* company." Not being an idiot, he did

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not mention to her the dinner appointment. He just walked out, making no explanation in his Pennsylvania Dutch husband's masterful way.

Shortly after the play opened, Gable got the part of Mercutio when the actor playing that role left the company. Clark was given this chance because he knew the play by heart.

Josephine was delighted. Day and night, he rehearsed at home, singing, humming, whispering and shouting his lines in the shower, between mouthfuls of breakfast, while driving his wife to market and before going to bed. Hotaling, while walking, playing golf and swimming with Gable, was repeatedly startled to hear him burst forth without warning into the lovely lines:

She is the fairies' midwife; and she comes
In shape no bigger than an agate stone
On the finger of an alderman . . .

To make sure he was letter-perfect in the role Miss Albertson worked hours with him many nights after the show. She remembers Gable as raw, but says he had an extraordinary amount of energy and was willing to work his heart out to make good.

Eddie Woods, a curly-haired young protégé of the MacLoons, was Gable's closest friend in the *Romeo and Juliet* troupe. Now a manager of theatres in New York, Mr. Woods had become a professional actor while a student at the University of California. He and Gable lived together while touring, and remained friends for years.

Gable accepted Eddie Woods as another fountainhead of knowledge and wisdom, because he was, like Hotaling, a college man. Today Eddie Woods has only fond recollections of him, but he has never got over his astonishment at Clark's ability to evolve later on into the screen's most graceful, suave and self-confident charmer.

"Persons who knew Clark Gable only after he made his sensational success in Hollywood," says Woods, "cannot imagine how clumsy and callow he was in those days. You admired him for some of the reasons the whole world did later on—his great warmth, his fascination with everything and, oddly enough, his innocence. But physically he was clumsy as an ox.

"There were times when Lillian Albertson despaired of ever teaching him to walk properly across the stage. I remember sitting with her one day in the window of her office. She looked out and saw Gable just crossing Hollywood Boulevard.

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"Look at that big, awkward galoot," she said. "Did you ever see any actor who walked more like a truck driver?"

The Cowl Company concluded its Los Angeles engagement at the end of June and headed for San Francisco. The cast was instructed to appear on the stage of the Curran Theatre for a house rehearsal on Monday afternoon. Most of the company left after the final performance. But Gable and Woods got into a ten-cent-limit poker game with the stage hands back stage which did not break up until six o'clock on Monday morning. That left the two actors just enough time to get to San Francisco for the rehearsals. Having had no sleep all night, they decided to take turns driving, one sleeping while the other was at the wheel.

Gable was driving as they approached Santa Barbara. He woke Woods up. "Look at those big cracks in the pavement, Eddie," he said. "Did you ever see anything more dangerous? All that guff the California Highway Department gives out—and they can't keep big roads like this one repaired."

As they came closer to town the cracks broadened. "If you'll stop the car and park it," whispered Eddie, "I'll tell you a secret."

"Don't look now, son," said Eddie when the car was parked, "but I think we've run into an earthquake."

What Eddie Woods remembers most vividly about that day was Gable's fascination. "Granting that anyone's first earthquake is an eye-popping sight, I've never seen anyone so completely intrigued, not to say thunderstruck. He might have been an archaologist discovering a long-lost city. No detail was too small to be overlooked. We were there for hours. I kept saying, 'Clark, we'll be late for that rehearsal.' All sorts of militiamen were trying to keep out the curious, but Clark smiled his way past them everywhere."

The Santa Barbara earthquake had come at 6.42 a.m. on that Monday morning, June 30, 1925, killed twelve persons and did \$20,000,000 worth of property damage. Buildings, large and small, had toppled like dominoes.

The ocean had receded, leaving before-breakfast bathers and many families of horseshoe crabs stranded on the wet sand far from the beach. Tram lines were twisted like spaghetti. The four walls of the big new California Hotel dropped to the ground like a badly made overcoat.

But Santa Barbara's famous Arlington Hotel suffered little damage. Captain Dixey W. Thompson, who owned it, invented, it is said, that

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horror of social horrors, the planned holiday. If a single guest at the Arlington went to bed except in a state of complete exhaustion it was not Captain Dixey's fault. For years he had been driving out his guests to picnics, mountain-climbing parties, tally-ho excursions, hunting trips, paper chases and searches of sea and land for rare flora and fauna.

God, in His Infinite Mercy, saw fit to spare the captain's majestic hotel, but what the earthquake did to the Arlington's English gardener, Robert Malcolm, may have served Captain Dixey as fair warning from on high.

Mr. Malcolm had risen at dawn to clip the hedges at the entrance. Suddenly a crack opened in the wall behind him, and a stream of water belted him savagely in the backside, knocking him through the hedge. "Didn't even have a chance to put my hedge clippers in a safe place," Mr. Malcolm declared on regaining his composure.

Gable was particularly intrigued by a wrecked seafood restaurant whose whole menu was now on the front sidewalk, mixed in with broken glasses and crockery, splintered wood and rocks.

"Fellow could pick up a damn good shore dinner here for himself—clams, oysters, fish, shrimp, lobster, salad," Gable said. "I'm a little too finicky myself to eat this food. But how about you, Eddie?"

The tour of *Romeo and Juliet* took the company to Portland, Seattle and Vancouver. Gable said later it was strange to be visiting Portland for once with a job and a little money in his pocket. Soon after that tour, Gable had his chance to show what he could do in *What Price Glory*? Clark impressed Lillian Albertson far more favourably than he had as Mercutio.

When Hale Hamilton, playing Sergeant Quirt—one of the two leading roles—left the show, Clark was given his role. But only on probation. It was his biggest chance.

"I don't know how I got through it," he told Eddie Woods later. "I was so nervous I hardly knew what I was doing."

"Of course he was nervous," said Woods, "yet he had that colossal ego to ride on that every actor who makes good must have. Clumsy, a stumbling novice, Gable always had class, as he proved later when he took in his stride stardom, like one to the manner born."

It was at this time, Eddie recalls, that Gable started complaining about his wife's interference with his career. She disapproved of the way Lillian Albertson was directing him. "Not long after," says

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Woods, "Josephine became such a nuisance that the MacLoons barred her from rehearsals."

Years later Josephine Dillon wrote that it was while playing in *What Price Glory?* that "he began to justify the faith I had held so unwaveringly. Except for some voice trouble in the out-of-town tryouts when he took the advice of the stage director about his voice instead of sticking to his own training." But Josephine neglected to suggest how he could have kept his job if he took her advice instead of following Miss Albertson's direction.

Gable played two subsequent engagements as Sergeant Quirt, once with Louis Wolheim himself playing the immortal Captain Flagg.

But his salary remained small. Between stage engagements Gable had to go back to extra work to keep eating. And most of the time he had not much more luck than before at this. Once or twice he had small bits in comedy series. One of these was *The Collegians* made by Junior Laemmle at Universal; another starred Alberta Vaughan.

And once B. P. Schulberg, a producer who later became one of the great men of Hollywood, saw enough in him to talk about building him up into a leading man. Schulberg tried him out in a small part in an Alice Joyce picture. Gable's work in this was a disappointment and Schulberg immediately lost interest in him.

So the sad and depressing struggle went on. No money, few amusements, a handful of friends. One luxury Gable did allow himself: that was attending the Los Angeles Automobile Show each year. Tickets cost \$2, but he managed to scrape it up each time no matter how broke he was. Loving big, beautiful cars the way he did, it was worth sacrificing almost anything for the chance to feast his eyes on the gleaming Rolls-Royces, Cadillacs, Hispano-Suizas and other gems.

And each time he was at the end of his rope another MacLoon-Albertson stage job came along. Hotaling was with him in Edward Knoblock's *The Lullaby*, in which Gable played a drunken sailor.

While appearing in *The Lullaby* in San Francisco, he met Franz again. She was there with the hope of making a career as a dancer. One evening, in a small night club frequented by performers, she saw an actor she knew.

"What are you doing in San Francisco?" he asked.

"I am teaching dancing at the Bell Studios."

"That's funny," he said thoughtfully, "I'm working at the Curran Theatre just across the street from there. So is Billy Gable." He added, "Billy told me he might be here tonight."

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The next day Gable telephoned her at the dance studio. He said he would leave a ticket for her at the box office, and asked her to meet him after the show. That evening she was smiling and cool when they met. He asked what she thought of his performance. He still seemed to her to lack skill and professional polish. But she told him, with some acerbity, that Miss Dillon had helped him enormously.

"She taught me timing," he agreed. But he said nothing at all about being married.

Clark appeared enchanted to be with Franz again. His grey-green eyes burned with interest and warm affection whenever he looked at her. They had several more dates, and when the show left town, she was beginning to hope again.

A few months later he was back, this time with Pauline Frederick's *Madame X* company. Again he was overjoyed to see Franz, but only able to spend a few evenings with her.

"Miss Frederick," he explained, "is for ever complaining that she has a sore back. She likes me to rub it for her."

Pauline Frederick, a great stage and screen star, was born in Boston within months of Jane Cowl. She was also one of the outstanding beauties of the century, being known as "the girl with the topaz eyes". Harrison Fisher, the illustrator, called her "the purest type of American beauty". Miss Frederick was one of the first Broadway stars to quit the stage for Hollywood. That was in 1915. The popularity of her films abroad was extraordinary and when she made a stage tour of England and Australia, "hysterical acclaim" greeted her everywhere.

Miss Frederick was a warm, sweet person, but she had a will of iron, especially where men were concerned. Her speciality was playing women who kept getting in trouble in spite of their noble intentions, sometimes because of them. Her great triumphs had been in that type of play and movie—*Zaza*, *La Tosca* and *Madame X*.

Ben Hecht has an interesting theory about why great actresses get into so much trouble in what is called their "private" lives. Hecht, that one-man reservoir of cynicism, says it is because they become the person they play on the stage.

It certainly seems true of Pauline Frederick, who was always up to her shapely neck in woe. By the time she fell in love with Gable she had been through three stormy marriages, had bankrupted E. R. Thomas, the New York newspaper publisher, and more than once had been accused in alienation of affection suits of breaking up happy

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homes. Her father had disowned her and Tommy Thorne, a young actor in the cast of one of her plays, *The Fourth Estate*, had hanged himself in his hotel room after she told him she did not love him. But one of her husbands, Willard Mack, the Broadway actor, playwright and bon-vivant, often said, "Pauline, my third wife, was the best one I ever had."

It was inevitable that Pauline Frederick should come to be painted in the Sunday supplements as a heart-wrecker, but it usually was her own reckless heart that she tripped over, for she was love-driven. Her passion for Gable knew no limit.

He was courtly with her, falling on one knee to kiss her hand. His courtliness, no matter how mocking he tried to make it seem, was sincere enough, but only covered casual phases of his relationship with such mature actresses. Eddie Woods thought it was instinctive. Once, as they waited to go on the stage, Clark noticed that Miss Frederick's shoelace was untied. At once, he was down on his knee before her to tie it.

But Gable disliked going to visit her. Whenever possible he got Woods to go along with him when he was invited to her mansion in Beverly Hills. After dinner, Miss Frederick either had music played on the organ or by two violinists. In the studios in those silent days they played music before making love scenes to induce the proper mood in the screen lovers.

Pauline thought it might work wonders with young Mr. Gable, but as the hour got late he would plead with Eddie in whispers, "Stick around! Don't leave me alone with her."

To more than one member of the *Madame X* cast Gable complained of having to buy "oysterettes", an aphrodisiac then sold at drugstores. "They talk about Al Jolson singing every song as though it would be the last of his life!" he groaned. "This woman acts every night as though she never expected to see another man."

He still looked underfed and haggard, but the gold upper teeth disappeared when Miss Frederick insisted he have proper dental work done, and paid for it.

About the time of his affair with Miss Frederick his relationship with Josephine began to deteriorate. He went to live alone in a furnished room. His explanation to Hotelling, Woods and other friends was that his wife wanted to continue in sole charge of his career. Josephine herself always said that she did not interfere in this way.

But she never blamed him for his affairs with women. "He was

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never much interested in them," she said. "He did not go after them. They did all the pursuing."

His sights were still on Broadway. One of his big thrills was playing with Lionel Barrymore in *The Copperhead*, one of Lionel's greatest stage successes. Lionel had since become a fixture in silent pictures, but he did not mind reviving *The Copperhead* in Los Angeles for a few weeks.

"The future for a young fellow like you lies in the movies," Barrymore once told Clark. "Get everything you can out of the theatre, son, but don't turn up your nose at these studios out here. You'll be working in them some day."

According to Eddie Woods, the relationship of Lionel and Gable was not nearly so friendly as most people later believed. There was, for one thing, Clark's physical clumsiness. This constantly irritated the old star. In one scene Gable managed to drop his hat down a well which had been described to the audience as being forty feet deep. Imperturbably he reached over, retrieved the hat and put it back on his head. He couldn't understand why the audience roared.

Luckily for Gable, Mr. Barrymore was not on the stage. During a rehearsal Gable had heard the old human bellows abuse another young actor, Douglas Montgomery, for failing to shut a door properly. Mr. B.'s language was enough to blister the ears off a Missouri mule.

Gable worried during each performance about Mr. Barrymore's custom of taking several slugs of whisky in his dressing-room between scenes.

"See if he is drunk tonight, won't you, Eddie?" Clark asked each evening. "My big scene with him will be on in just a few moments."

But like the true Barrymore he was, Lionel could walk woozily out of his dressing-room and never show a sign of it once he stepped on the stage.

There was much more cause to worry about the constant imbibing of Ian Keith, another muddle-aged actor in the company. The climactic scene of the play came when Keith, playing a Union Army colonel, brought Abraham Lincoln's pardon to Barrymore. Every night as the time for this scene approached, searching parties had to be sent out to the neighbourhood speakeasies to find Ian Keith and sober him up in time for him to go on.

One night the coffee-and-cold-towel treatment did not work. Ian Keith was able to get on the stage without a telltale quiver. But once

on he was unable to say one word. Barrymore, always a master at ad-libbing, said tenderly, "Oh, you are ill, Colonel. Well, sit right down there, sir."

He led him to a chair, holding Keith firmly to prevent his collapsing. When Ian gave no sign of recovering his powers of speech, Barrymore said, "What is that white paper sticking out of your pocket, Colonel? Is it for me, perhaps?"

Mr. Keith was unable to respond even with a nod of his head. Barrymore leaned over him as though the colonel was whispering something, and exclaimed, "My *pardon*, you say?" He took the document out of Mr. Keith's pocket. The day was saved and the curtain came down to thunderous applause.

Though no great admirer or friend of Gable's at this time, Barrymore did see a blazing quality in him that he suspected could set the heart of the world on fire.

In his autobiography, written with Cameron Shipp, Lionel said, "I took an interest in him originally because he looked like Jack Dempsey. I thought he had all the makings though the only distinguished thing he did at the time was to drop his hat down the well."

Gable's next show was *Chicago* with Nancy Carroll, the beautiful doll-faced redhead from New York's Tenth Avenue. He played Jake the reporter.

Like everyone else who played with Gable when he was unknown, Nancy has been bedevilled ever since incessantly by young actresses who wish to know what he was like in those days. And what she and the others who are honest tell Clark's young feminine admirers is: "He made practically no impression at all on me! He was like any other struggling young actor, no more, no less." However, there were one or two things Nancy, still pretty and blue-eyed as Killarney's lakes, did recall.

"Though my role, Roxie Hart, was the whole show," she said, "Gable really did think *Chicago* was his play. Perhaps because Charles Bickford had played the same role and made his reputation with it. But Gable was the first hat-on-the-back-of-his-head reporter in stage history, unless I'm mistaken. However, Jake was not the most important male role in the show, or the second most important.

"When people later spoke of Clark's stiff-legged stride as something new, I was really surprised. Gable had it then. And he did not seem interested too much in women. He was a 'man's man'; by that I mean he usually wanted another fellow with him before he could talk to

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you. He felt more at ease with a male companion, and at that time the man he always had with him was Eddie Woods."

Miss Carroll remembers the shock sustained by a Los Angeles girl who had a small part in the company. She was smitten on sight by Gable's swaggering ways on the stage.

"But a funny thing happened in San Francisco when we took the show there. We all went one night to a speakeasy. Most of us had drinks. But this girl, who could not take her eyes off Clark Gable for one minute, got the surprise of her life there. I suppose she expected him to order a triple shot of Scotch. Instead he ordered milk and corn flakes, and that was before the day that even the makers of Wheaties dared call them 'the breakfast food of champions'."

Nancy Carroll's interpretation of the role of Roxie Hart won her a contract which swiftly led to stardom and \$5,000 a week as a Paramount star. Gable signed to play stock in Houston.

Ironically, Clark was also offered a screen test by M-G-M as the result of his work on Broadway. He told the talent scout of the company whose biggest asset he was destined to become, "I don't want to have anything more to do with pictures. The stage is what I want. With luck I can make good on Broadway some day. But why waste my time and your money? I've tried movie work often enough to become convinced I have nothing Hollywood wants."

On That Street Called Broadway

GENE LEWIS had been operating stock companies all over Texas for years. Each summer he would come roaring up to Hollywood with his wife Virginia in a big limousine, looking for actors. When they found the players pleasing to their eyes and ears, they packed them into their big car and went roaring back to Texas.

At this stage of his career a season of stock work was what Clark needed most. In stock, playing a different part each week, he would be able to measure and assess his talent, get a chance to play everything from farce comedy to tragedy.

For round actors, as they have come to be called, there has never been a better audience than those that attended stock company shows. Most of them came every week and soon got to know you. If they liked you at all, they began to behave like relatives, applauding your entrance, laughing uproariously at your funny lines, worrying about the character you were playing when he got squeezed into a tough spot—and they insisted on your taking an individual bow or two at the curtain.

If something went wrong they did their best to ignore it. In stock you could relax enough while on the stage to learn from your mistakes and experiment occasionally. You learned to cope with emergencies, cover up somebody's fluff or spell of sudden forgetfulness.

And whenever the stock actor walked through the streets of the town, he felt he was somebody. Nobody tried to tear the buttons off his coat or to smear his face with lipstick-wet kisses. But old ladies who had heard him cough during a performance might stop him and ask

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him if his cold was better. The storekeepers in the shops smiled as he passed and waved from their windows. He felt that he was known, appreciated and enjoyed. If a woman admirer palpitated for him to make love to her, she sent a perfumed note. From the beginning, Gable received more than his share of these.

But he was so fiercely intent on making good that he ignored the love notes. During his first couple of months in Houston he made it his practice to be in his hotel room every night no later than eleven-thirty. This was so that he could study his sides for the following week's show. He would keep at it until three or four o'clock in the morning. After the first couple of months though, memorizing a part became easier and he did not have to work at it so hard.

He had been in Houston only a little while when Josephine came down and joined the company. She played for a few weeks with the Gene Lewis players, then left. Gable later complained bitterly to Frank Hotaling and Eddie Woods that again she had tried to interfere with the way he was being directed. They'd had very stormy scenes about it, he said.

After twelve weeks of playing second leads, Clark got a real break. The leading man left, and Gable was given his job—at \$200 a week. It was his luck that his first lead was in Eugene O'Neill's *Anna Christie*. He played Matt Burke, the Irish seaman who falls in love with Anna, and on learning that she is a whore gets drunk and goes wild.

Both of the Lewises thought he was good in *Anna Christie*, and decided to keep him on as male lead for the rest of the season. Clark was exultant. If he saved every cent he could get to Broadway! After all these years!

Houston's women, young, middle-aged and old, made a matinée idol out of him in no time. One of the young ones was related to one of Houston's best tailors, and she argued her father into giving Gable several new suits, claiming that he would get plenty of business when word got around that Gable was wearing his clothes.

Another local beauty offered him half of the flourishing insurance business she'd inherited. All she asked was that he marry her.

"I'm married to a charming woman now," he said.

"I've seen her," the girl said. "I don't think she's so charming. We'll double my business in no time, working together. What an insurance salesman you'll make, darling!"

The third Houston woman who fell in love with him was more subtle in her approach. She was Mrs. Ria Franklin Prentiss Lucas

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Langham, a woman who had some financial connexion with the stock company. She had been married three times and had three grown children. A month after Gable came to Houston, Mrs. Langham divorced her husband, Andrew Langham, a prosperous insurance agent. Her friends have always insisted that this was because Ria and Langham had not been getting along. What seems indisputable is that Gable was not in love with Mrs. Langham or anyone else when the Gene Lewis Stock Players concluded their season late that spring. For once in his life he was solvent, and had a first-class wardrobe. He also had saved \$385 in Houston. He headed for Hollywood and looked up the MacLoons. They were just leaving for New York, and urged him to cross the country with them.

"Don't hang around here until your money is all gone," was the motherly advice Lillian Albertson gave him. "Get to New York while you have some eating money and decent clothes. This town is going nuts."

The talkies, which would prove to be the greatest thing that ever happened to Hollywood, had all the studio moguls holding their heads. They did not know what would become of their greatest stars, some of whom talked in grunts, gasps and gargles.

Gable could still not see any future for himself in films, whether he talked in them or kept his mouth shut. But he got no stage offers while in Los Angeles on that trip, so headed with the MacLoons for New York, which he'd never seen before.

Hollywood, which was to be enriched tenfold by the talkies, might be afraid of them, but Broadway's people who were about to be all but ruined by them were unruffled by any possible effect they might have on their treasure, the living theatre.

George Jean Nathan, who considered himself show business's best friend and severest critic, had written them off with this one flip paragraph:

The theatre need not be worried over the Vitaphone, the mechanical invention which synchronizes the movies and human speech. If there is any worrying to do it is the movies that should do it. For if Vitaphone or its like is ever adopted by the movies, it will not be long before the galleries of the legitimate theatres are again filled with the class of individuals who deserted them some years ago for the films . . . if the Vitaphone gets its deadly hold on the movies it won't be long before the latter's current millionaires are driven back to their former pants and delicatessen businesses.

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Broadway was surely the place to be that summer of 1928. As always it was a lot more fun if one had money. But everybody around Times Square seemed loaded down with the dirty green stuff, even the actors. Eddie Cantor was running up and down Shubert Alley telling everyone he met to buy Goldman, Sachs and Company stocks, which had made him a millionaire. Al Jolson greeted people with, "I'm Al Jolson and I have four million dollars." Lou Holtz owned an hotel next to the new New York Times building on West 43rd Street. Even Joe Frisco, the witty horseplayer, was solvent.

It was a peak year on Broadway, one of the last great ones the old street was ever to see. Florenz Ziegfeld alone had three great musicals going for him. All the old-time producers were still investing their own money in their shows, including Belasco, Brady, George C. Tyler, George M. Cohan, Arthur Hopkins, Sam H. Harris. Eugene O'Neill's trick nine-act play *Strange Interlude* was breaking records for the Theatre Guild and had Gable's old friend from Astoria, Earl Larimore, in one of the key roles. Also at his peak was Jed Harris, the boy wonder who had made fortunes out of *Broadway*, *Coquette* and *The Royal Family*. Jed was about to make another with Hecht and MacArthur's *The Front Page*.

That summer Broadway was crowded with beautiful girls, brilliant, hard-drinking newspapermen, hook joints for the suckers, gaudy dance halls for the lonely, champions of all sports, and weight classes. Joy was in the air. The best food in town was to be found in the classiest speak-easies, and you could now drink bootlegged whisky and gin in the moderate-priced spots without going blind or getting the bends.

The Chamberlain Brown office, which then cast most of the Broadway shows, was glad to add Clark Gable to its list of 150 clients. They'd heard good reports of his work from Houston and from the MacLoons. Eddie Woods, who'd been in New York for some months, took Gable to the agents' West 45th Street office and introduced him to Chamberlain Brown and his brother Lyman, a fragile cricket of a man who assisted him.

Within two weeks the Browns had landed Clark one of the choice male leads of the new season, playing the lover in Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal*, which Arthur Hopkins was producing. Hopkins, a plump, middle-aged mystic, was then the most versatile of the successful Broadway producers, and among the kindest. His greatest feat was putting on the cycle of plays, including Tolstoi's *Redemption*, Benelli's *The Jest*, *Hamlet* and *Richard III*, which had proved John Barrymore

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to be the greatest English-speaking actor of his generation. But Hopkins was also expert at putting on phantasies like *The Poor Little Rich Girl*, melodramas like *On Trial* and *What Price Glory?* and farces like *Good Gracious*, *Annabelle*.

The afternoon that Clark Gable walked out of Hopkins's office in the Plymouth Theatre he felt that the world was in his pocket at last. A half-block away, Broadway glittered and shimmered in the summer afternoon sun just for him.

A typescript of the play under his arm, he strolled down to the Brown office to tell the brothers the good news. Then he went to the tiny back room he had rented in the modest Hotel Richmond on West 46th Street, and read the play. It seemed that the part which the author named only *A Man* was as tailor-made for him as Matt Burke had been, even though it was so different from O'Neill's sailor. *A Man* was an adventurer who took his women and his capers as they came his way. When a married woman with a child, a role to be played by Zita Johann, fell in love with him, he enjoyed her, then moved on to Mexico because she got too tiresome. When she killed her husband to get him out of her way and *A Man* had the choice of risking his neck to save her or betraying her, he hesitated not a minute before signing the affidavit that told of their affair and would send her to the electric chair.

Gable relaxed as he read the script.

This was it, the play that would put him over in a big way. Hopkins and everyone else who had read *Machinal* were sure it would run on Broadway all season, at the very least. The play was a dramatization of the recent Snyder-Gray murder case which had stunned the country. Judd Gray, the lover in that case, had been a milksop, but making his counterpart in the play a ruthless, foot-loose man without a conscience seemed to make the stage play much more savagely effective.

With the part, he saw the door to a golden future open. No more missed meals or money troubles for him. Not after this one opened on Broadway.

The people of New York meanwhile remained unaware that a great new star was about to be hatched. There was not a word about him in the papers, not even during the week preceding the September 7 opening.

All week, the strange silence about Gable's presence in the cast of *Machinal* continued. The mysterious silence continued even on Sunday. *The World* that day published a huge drawing of Zita Johann, whom

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Gable considered merely his leading woman. Two other members of the cast, Charles Kennedy and Jean Adair, were mentioned in the caption.

The day before the opening the newspapers gave him the willies. Broadway's stagehands, they announced, were threatening to strike at the end of the week. Gable did some quick calculating. The show was opening on a Friday night. His money was running low. If the stagehands carried out their threat, he would get three-eighths of \$200, for the Friday night show and the two on Saturday. That meant \$75, less his agent's commission. Gable began to sweat.

But the thrill of his first opening night on Broadway caused Clark to forget the strike threat—until the performance was over. Next day the reviewers as one man agreed that Miss Johann could not have been better. They gave Clark good notices too—those who mentioned him at all. Mr. Brooks Atkinson, in the *Times*, apparently had no space for him in his morning-after review. But in his Sunday article, Brooks made up for his neglect by describing Clark Gable thus: "smiling, glowing with healthy youth, Clark Gable expresses admirably the glamorous vagabond". The *Morning Telegraph* pronounced him "young, vigorous and brutally masculine"; the *New Yorker* thought him "excellent as the lover".

But it was a case of *Chicago* all over again. All the real kudos had gone to Zita Johann who was acclaimed as though she were a young Sarah Bernhardt, a Venus newly arisen from the waters of New York Bay. All critics were certain that Zita was destined to become one of the most glittering of Broadway's young stage stars. The production itself also got rave reviews.

Eddie Woods told Gable he should be overjoyed at his wonderful notices and not to mind playing second fiddle to Miss Johann, who was besides everything else, a great beauty.

The best news of all for Gable came when the stagehands at the last minute decided not to strike. *Machinal* settled down for what promised to be a long, lucrative run. After the show had been running a couple of weeks, Clark bought himself a secondhand car. On the street one day he ran into Frank Hoteling, who had been in stock out in Cleveland. He spent some nights with Hoteling, some with Eddie Woods, but for some reason never introduced them to one another.

Mrs. Langham came up from Houston and took an apartment on Fifth Avenue. Clark began spending a good deal of time with her, but never brought either of his actor-friends around to see her. *Machinal*

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never bloomed into a hit, and closed after ninety-one performances, in its twelfth week.

He sold his secondhand car the week after the show closed. Once again he was broke, jobless and worried to death. Josephine was in New York playing in *The Ivory Door*, but he refused either to see her or talk to her on the telephone. In the end she was reduced to pleading with Frank Hotaling, "Find out what Gable is going to do. Find out if he wants a divorce."

With some embarrassment Hotaling, after repeated proddings from Mrs. Gable, gathered the courage to bring up the matter.

"What in hell do I want a divorce for?" Clark told him angrily. "I never intend to get married again as long as I live. If she wants a divorce, let her get it!"

Meanwhile, more women were pursuing him than he cared to bother with. Mrs. Langham had a daughter at finishing school in Westchester County and explained to friends that she had taken the apartment in New York to be near her girl.

It was Ria Langham who gave Gable his first look at and taste for gracious living. Her apartment was exquisitely furnished. He liked this new world of Aubusson rugs, Chippendale and Hepplewhite furniture, dinners beautifully served by candlelight, wine poured as though every drop was a treasure, furniture made by artists, and best of all the gay and interesting conversation.

He might have felt ill at ease with any other hostess but Ria, a woman with wit and understanding. She had the manner of a woman who had always had money—which was not true.

Maria Franklin was born in Kentucky and grew up in Macomb, Illinois, where she became the teen-age bride of William Prentiss. Shortly after her first child, a boy, was born she left Prentiss and went with her son to live in Houston with her father.

Houston has always been known for its beautiful women, but Ria quickly conquered it and under somewhat difficult circumstances. To support herself and her son she went to work in J. J. Sweeney's jewellery store, which is sometimes called "the Cartier's of Texas". Ria's skin had been like cream in those days. She was small and shapely, but it was her brown eyes that captivated men. She had been, like Gable, born with the gift of looking at members of the opposite sex in a way that flattered and excited them.

In no time at all Ria had a dozen wealthy suitors. From among them she made a wise choice, a millionaire oilman named Alfred T. Lucas.

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He built her a home that was one of the showplaces of the city. She presided over it as though to the manner born. It was a warm and happy marriage for both of them. She had two more children by Lucas, a son and a daughter, but a dozen years or so after she became Mrs. Lucas, she was widowed.

Her next husband, Andrew Langham, an insurance broker, was also wealthy. Ria's friends in Houston have always scoffed at the idea that this marriage was wrecked when she fell in love with Clark. They say that Ria and Langham were having marital difficulties long before she ever met Gable.

After *Machinal* closed, Gable had an increasingly difficult time of it. He enjoyed Ria's company and that of the guests he met in her home. He continued going there whenever she invited him. In her company, listening to her gay and wonderful talk, it was possible for him to forget what was still his dilemma: should he give up the stage and get a steady job? As obsessed as he was by the passion to be an actor, he was approaching thirty, did not know how much longer he could go on fighting for a place in a world that still gave no sign of either needing or wanting him.

Yet it was not only the friendship of the middle-aged Ria that enabled him to go on hoping during this bleak period. What really encouraged him were the efforts Chamberlain and Lyman Brown kept making to find him another leading role in which he could show what he could do.

Of course, like everyone who makes a success on the magnificent scale that Gable did, he had come along at precisely the right moment. The Broadway theatre, its plays, its actors, were all changing. The disillusionment that followed the Armistice ended the dominance of unabashed sentimentality and blood-and-thunder dramas. And with them had gone, or were going, the moustached villain with foul designs, the pure-as-driven-snow heroine and her dauntless hero. The more sophisticated playgoers of the twenties preferred to see reasonable facsimiles of human beings on the stage. And the new playwrights, O'Neill, Philip Barry, Sidney Howard, George Kelly, Kaufman and Connelly, among others, were able to give them talk, situations and plots they could believe in.

The actors just coming up were a new crowd. They were neither beautiful, epicene types nor did they resemble the larger-than-life performers—the Holbrook Blinns, Otis Skinners, Arnold Dalys and Leo Dietrichsteins—whose great day was passing.

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These newcomers were like the characters they played, hard-muscled, tough-minded, sweaty, vital. They were prone to error, but also given to moments of great perception. They were actors destined to become great Hollywood movie stars. Among them were Jimmy Cagney, Humphrey Bogart, Paul Muni, Fredric March, Edward G. Robinson, Burgess Meredith, Robert Montgomery, Spencer Tracy, Pat O'Brien.

This was the sort of competition, incidentally, that Gable had. The Browns zealously dispatched him to every manager who sent out a call. Yet, thanks to the competition, it was almost a full year after the opening of *Machinal* before they were able to land him another good role.

During those long months of unemployment Clark fell into the habit of dropping into the Chamberlain Brown office when it opened at ten. He would sit around there for an hour or two, waiting for something to turn up. At noon he would leave, either coming back late in the afternoon or checking by telephone.

Some time after Gable died, a middle-aged reporter visited the office to see if anyone there remembered anything about the daily visits of the most popular actor the agency ever handled.

His first surprise was the office itself. He had last visited the place back in the twenties, when it was a bustling, well-lighted office where phones rang, and errand boys dashed in and out on mysterious missions. You might meet almost any of the great stage stars of the day there, sitting and waiting to see one or the other of the Browns.

The offices were still in the same building, 145 West 45th Street, but that was almost the only thing about them that had not changed. They had been relegated to a vast cryptlike space in the rear. No one was in the reception room, a gloomy chamber without chairs. The walls were covered with fading old coloured posters, dusty and fly-specked. But they pictured the scenes from the great shows of the old times and some of the stars who were in them: Modjeska in *Magda*, Ethel Barrymore in *Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines*, John Drew in *Held by the Enemy*, World Heavyweight Champion John L. Sullivan in *Hearts of Oak* and *New York by Gaslight*, Joseph Jefferson in *Rip Van Winkle*, James O'Neill in *The Count of Monte Cristo*, and Denman Thompson in *The Old Homestead*.

And it was like walking through all the yesterdays of the American stage to go inside to a larger room, more posters on the walls, autographed photographs, too, with names scrawled on them, names

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forgotten everywhere but in the Lambs Club. Photos yellowing and dirty, of song-and-dance men in top hats and somehow still jaunty, beauties in low-cut gowns, tragedians looking thoughtful, road-company Billy Burkes with piquant smiles.

There was nothing in this big room except dust-covered old wooden files and a half-dozen big tables on which were stacked neatly intact copies of the *New York Sunday Times*, each in its place, dating back for many years and untouched by human hands since being placed there.

The adjoining chamber was lighted, like the others, by only a single naked light bulb that dangled from the ceiling. More ancient issues of the *Sunday Times* here, too, autographed pictures, more posters of Rose Stahl, Maggie Cline and James K. Hackett, among others.

Chamberlain Brown had died some time in the fifties, but here was his shadowy, wistful-faced brother Lyman, a crippled little cricket of a man, old and with bones twisted and tortured by arthritis. But bright and cheerful as in the days when there was sunshine and activity in the office, and stars waiting patiently for him to see them.

"Oh, yes, I remember Clark," he said, the old face lighting up. "Who could forget him? He was so affable—no matter how badly things were going for him. It was so pleasant having that young man around. Chamberlain and I almost regretted it each time we got him a job. I can almost see him now, standing in a corner, watching the others with those friendly, smiling eyes of his, taking everything in as though amused by it all. And later, when a particularly beautiful actress had left, he would whisper, 'Who was that one, Lyman?'"

"If you wanted coffee and no boy was around, he would get it for you, or do an errand. Never subserviently, of course, but as a friend might who happened also to be a client. Always dignified, yet always looking amused and pleased with everything that met his eye.

"In those days he wore a derby and carried a gold-headed cane. Always well dressed, of course, and neat, fantastically neat and dapper. He had a small mustache and he had those teeth that were so very broad, almost square, almost like white dominoes."

With startling agility, the small Lyman Brown leaped up, dived into a near-by file and came up with a dog-eared publicity photo of Clark, ears out like water wings, hair parted in the middle and plastered flat. On the back was typed, with the year for each, the various addresses at which Gable could be reached, starting with 1924, Hotel Richmond, and ending with 4525 Petit, Encino, California, the home he was living in when he died.

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"We always kept hoping that he would come back to us and Broadway, and do a play. Here was where he belonged, my dear sir, and he never should have left the stage."

He took a deep breath, smiled, and went on: "Clark was never egotistical. Some people may have thought so because he appeared so confident.

"The thing that gave us faith in Clark was his personality. There was a twinkle in his eye. His eyes seemed to dance. There was a roguishness and an innocence about him. We felt that if he could convey all of that to us in his eyes he would be able to project it through the camera. Photogenically I didn't know. The picture people were doing wonderful things with cheesecloth then, making youngsters look old, et cetera, and we thought they could do something with him.

"We knew he would be thrilling on the stage if only we could get him the right part. And we never stopped trying. It was not just his sex appeal. In fact, we got him into one show in which the leading lady objected very strongly to playing opposite him. She was also our client and so she came to us with her complaint. "I can't stand that man Gable. You must have him fired. I can't endure kissing him. Get somebody else less repulsive! Please!"

"We calmed her down, but, as you can imagine, it took a bit of doing."

Mr. Brown recalled a day when a beautiful show girl from Earl Carroll's *Vanities* came through an office door which was plainly marked PRIVATE DO NOT ENTER.

"Please ask her to go out," he told Clark, "and come in through the right door."

Gable seemed uneasy. "Suppose she doesn't care to do that?" he asked.

"Put her out!" said Mr. Lyman Brown.

With a shrug, Gable went over to the girl. "Don't you dare touch me," she warned him. He looked around. Mr. Brown jabbed a steady finger in the direction of the door.

With a sigh, Gable put her out, then complained to Lyman, "I paid eleven dollars last night for a seat to see her show. When I saw that girl on the stage I was crazy about her. I would have waited at the stage door for her to come out, if that would not have made me feel too foolish. And now you made me put her out of here."

He rolled his eyes heavenward as the main office door opened and

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the girl strode in. He ventured a smile, but she gave him so scornful a look that he turned away.

In telling the story, Mr. Brown made the point, "I do not think he cared too much about that girl. One could not be sure. One could never quite be sure what Clark was thinking—if anything. That was one of his great attractions as a man, the mystery of what he was thinking and would be doing next. Also as an actor. It captured and held one's interest even on the screen, even though you knew that the picture was completed and whatever he was going to say or do next had already been said or done—he aroused your emotions because you were not quite sure. It added greatly to the suspense of watching him. Bogart had the same gift, but who else?"

In the town that was whirling with spenders in 1929, Clark dined with Frank Hotaling two or three times a week at the various Italian speakeasy restaurants that dotted the West Forties. For sixty-five or seventy-five cents they served a whopping meal—antipasto, minestrone soup, Italian bread in great chunks, veal scaloppini or shrimp marinara with spaghetti, dessert and coffee.

What Gable enjoyed most in New York, Hotaling recalls, was going to night court each evening. In the late twenties that was the best free show in New York for those who wanted to see what low life was like in the world's richest city. Arranged each midnight were all the pickpockets, pimps, stick-up men, burglars, whores, and drunken bums who had been arrested after 3 p.m., the hour when the police courts ended their day.

Each evening the court filled up with curiosity seekers in evening dress who had deserted their plush, illegal pubs for an hour or two to see how the other half lives and dies. There were also usually in attendance some actors like Gable, and writers who wished to study life at its grittiest.

Early in 1929 he took a quick trip back to the Coast, travelling first class. Nancy Carroll ran into him aboard the Twentieth Century on the way to Chicago. Since they'd appeared together in *Chicago* less than two years before, Nancy had clicked big in pictures and was making thousands of dollars a week. The Tenth Avenue redhead was proving herself a smart little businesswoman, was acting as her own agent. At the moment she was returning from her first personal-appearance tour to exploit her movie, *Abie's Irish Rose*.

She says, "We got into Chicago on February fifteenth and read in

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the papers of the St. Valentine's Day Massacre in which seven members of the Bugs Moran gang had been executed by machine-gun by rival mobsters dressed in police uniforms. The dragnet was out, the newspapers said, for every gangster in Chicago, including Al Capone.

"Gable and I simultaneously got the idea of seeing the roundup, if we could. 'Let's find a reporter,' he said, 'and maybe he'll take us there.' My husband, Jack Kirkland, was an ex-reporter, and I knew what most reporters looked like. I told Clark, 'Now don't expect to find a reporter who looks like those you see in pictures and plays. Keep your eye out for a small, meek-appearing, scholarly man.' We did and we found one. He took us to police headquarters. When we told the officials there that we were performers who wanted to study life in the raw, the police sighed, but let us see what real criminals look like. It was quite an experience for both of us, believe me, watching every sort of thief, gunman, hophead and other underworld people being brought in for questioning in crowds like that. In those days there was a six-hour layover in Chicago before you could get a fast train to the Coast. Gable and I did not leave police headquarters that day until we had to."

What Nancy Carroll recalled most vividly about that day is watching Gable's reaction to one sad sight. The police permitted them to sit in on the questioning of half a dozen little Negro boys who had been arrested for the murder of a grain merchant whose store they had tried to rob. The boys were eight to thirteen years old, terrified out of their wits and in a frenzy of blaming one another. Gable looked as though he could hardly endure it.

Once he nudged Nancy and whispered, "Look at how that vein stands out and throbs in that child's neck! It is almost as if his heart is pumping so fast that it makes the blood leap and jump."

"In my whole life," says Nancy, "I have never looked at a man who seemed so close to bursting with compassion."

The trip to the West Coast brought no offers. After a short stay Gable went back to New York. Late that spring the Brown office got him a job that promised to do wonders for his career. This was the leading role in George M. Cohan's new play *Gambling*.

In this murder mystery George M. had broken away from flag-waving and the other sentimental hokum out of which he had made millions in his younger days. He was attempting to follow the realistic trend, and succeeded as only George M. could. His hero, the gambler, seemed a lecher and there were several debauched women. But he

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came off with a finish that sent the customers home happy when his gambler turned out to be posing as a dirty thief and that only in order to solve a murder.

The out-of-town opening in Philadelphia convinced Cohan that drastic rewriting was in order. He was also dissatisfied with Gable's performance. In Atlantic City several weeks later he fired Clark and, though George M. had officially and permanently retired as an actor, stepped into the role himself.

It was a hit when he brought it into New York.

To come so close to succeeding and lose out once again threw Gable into a state of despair. However, the Browns, who still believed in him, rushed him without delay into the lead of *Hawk Island*. In this he played the rum-running owner of a seagoing yacht.

At Gable's invitation, Frank Hotelling went to the out-of-town opening in New Rochelle, New York. But something had gone out of Clark. His performance lacked his usual spirit and dash.

"Clark was really bad in this," says Hotelling. "Usually he stood on stage and off straight as a soldier. But in this one he slouched around like an amateur. In fact, Mrs. Lester Lornegan, wife of the director, was worried enough about his posture to speak to me about it during the second intermission. She knew Gable and I were good friends, and said, 'Can't you speak to Gable about standing a little straighter in his big scenes?'"

Gable got favourable, if mild, notices when the play was brought to New York. The *Sun's* Stephen Rathbun called him "pleasant" and "well-mannered". Bide Dudley in the *Evening World* wrote: "Mr. Gable seemed to be hoarse last night. Nevertheless, he proved himself a likable actor." In the *Herald Tribune*, Howard Barnes declared him "the most competent in the cast". The play was a failure, ran for less than four weeks. In another theatre up the street *Gambling*, starring George M. Cohan, ran all season. And worse luck was coming. His next play, David Belasco's *Blind Windows*, did not get to New York at all, closing after its dismal out-of-town tryout.

Clark's last show on Broadway was in support of Alice Brady in *Love, Honor and Betray*, which opened on March 12, 1930. It was produced by her father, William A. Brady. Also in the cast were a couple of other performers—Glenda Farrell and George Brent—who shortly afterwards became Hollywood stars. Both had bigger roles than Gable. Again he got only mild notices. The show ran for forty-five performances, less than eight weeks.

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His great adventure on Broadway had lasted more than a year and a half. In that time he had appeared in New York in two failures and one semi-success, working altogether for about twenty-three weeks. •

But while he was in the Alice Brady show Clark got the break of his life, though he did not recognize it as that. This was an offer wired by Louis O. MacLoon to play Killer Mears in *The Last Mile* on the West Coast. This was a sensational melodrama built around a prison break. In it Spencer Tracy, as a doomed man in the death house who leads the bust-out, was scoring the hit of his young life. Gable was reluctant to play the role. He doubted that he could play a killer as well as Tracy.

On learning that Gable was hesitating, MacLoon telephoned him and said, "You won't have to be that good out here." Gable took the job and this time everybody in Hollywood recognized his magnetic power and skill. And as the embittered Killer Mears, Gable had the perfect weapon to express the resentment against life he was feeling just then.

Now every studio in town wanted to make a screen test of him. Among those who came backstage on opening night to congratulate him was Lionel Barrymore. He told Gable that he thought he had a part for him in *Never the Twain Shall Meet*, a picture that M-G-M had agreed to let him direct.

What happened when that screen test was made has been told countless times. Lionel's own account in the autobiography he wrote with Cameron Shipp relates the tale this way:

I had him wear nothing but some orchids and a lei or something, and a blossom behind his ear. I made three or four scenes and had Gable stick out his chest in all of them.

"Brother, the guy's wonderful," I said to myself.

To Clark I said, "Okay, boy, I'm sure you're in."

I had my tests developed and called Irving Thalberg to look at them. I expected to be crowned with laurels, but Irving nodded his head in an indefinite negative, and walked out.

I was ashamed to call Clark and tell him that he and I had made a total failure, that Thalberg had turned him down.

Gable's version was slightly different. "They took me over to the make-up room and with Lionel supervising them, they put very dark make-up all over my body and they curled my hair. Then they stuck a hibiscus flower behind my ear and put a G-string on me and took me

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down to the stage to take the test. I felt silly but Lionel was watching, and he said, 'It's okay, it's all right.'

"Well, he took the test to Thalberg who took one look and said, 'Good Lord, Lionel! No, not *that*. Take it away! Get out! Get out!' "

Depressing as this was, Gable had a job waiting for him in New York, a good role in the play adapted from Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* which A. H. Woods was planning for the autumn.

But as he was packing he got a last-minute call from Minna Wallis, an agent who had become interested in him. "Sonny boy," she said, "I can get you a movie job in a Western."

"I can't ride," Clark said. "I haven't been on horseback since I was a kid back in Ohio."

"You'd ride a horse for seven hundred and fifty dollars a week, wouldn't you?"

"I'd ride a tiger for that," Gable told her, "but I signed a contract to do a play in New York."

"See if you can get out of it," said Minna.

Gable put in a long-distance call for Al Woods in New York. He explained the situation. "Are you sure of the job, son?" Mr. Woods asked.

"No. I'm going to talk to the man at the studio today, I think."

"Well, make sure of it, sweetheart," said Mr. Woods. "If you get it, phone me and I'll wire you a release from our contract in the morning."

Minna Wallis took Gable to the Pathé Studio, where the casting director seemed favourably impressed.

"Can you ride, Gable?"

Before he could answer, Minna shouted, "Are you trying to be insulting? Would you ask Stonewall Jackson if he could ride a horse? This man has the blood of Buffalo Bill in his veins. He even comes from General Custer's home town. Don't you, Clark?"

Gable said he did.

The casting agent asked him to step outside while he discussed salary with his agent. He thought she might demand less with her client out of the room, might be less tempted to show off. But when Minna came out of his office, she had the deal for \$750 a week.

"But I can't ride," said Gable, who could not believe for one moment that he was going to get any such staggering salary as she claimed.

"Take lessons," said Minna Wallis.

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Gable notified Woods that he had taken the picture and got the wired release from his pay contract within a few hours. Next he went out into the valley and hired an old cowboy named Art Wilson to give him daily lessons. When the day scheduled for the start of the picture came, Gable was ready. Art Wilson, no man to praise a tenderfoot, had told him so.

But the director of *The Painted Desert* was not ready to start shooting that day, or for many a day. "But you are on salary from today on," he was told, "so don't worry." Gable didn't. Before the movie was finished he had drawn seventeen weeks' salary. But during the making of that movie he had a narrow escape. The high point of the picture came when the side of a mountain was blown up.

Error on someone's part resulted in the cowboy posse being delayed. They rode right into the explosion, resulting in one man being killed and thirty others injured. Gable did not even get scratched. The legend is that he was riding on a horse that had a premonition something was about to go wrong, and stopped short before reaching the danger area.

"Maybe it is just as well that I was a novice rider," Gable once commented when discussing this. "If I'd had more brains than that horse I might have forced him to run ahead with the others and we'd both have been blown to hell."

Ruth Collier, Minna Wallis's partner, told Clark after seeing *The Painted Desert*, "We won't have trouble selling you after that picture is released. And you won't have to make any more tests. You're in."

A few days later he read in the newspapers that Pathé was on the verge of going bankrupt. This meant that *The Painted Desert's* première might be delayed indefinitely while litigants fought in bankruptcy court for possession of the company's remains.

While he was brooding over this possibility, Warner Brothers called him. Mervyn LeRoy, a director there, wanted to make a screen test of him. When he told Eddie Woods about it, Eddie said, "That's funny. They just called me, too. We'll be making tests there the same day."

It sounded like a good omen. What LeRoy wanted to test Gable for was the title role in *Little Caesar*, the movie role that was to make Edward G. Robinson a big-money star. Mervyn LeRoy shook Clark's hand. "You're in, kid," he said.

When Clark saw Woods again, he seemed depressed. "If only they would get a new line of dialogue besides that hard-luck one, 'You're in.'"

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"Oh, stop squawking," Woods told him.

Through a girl at the studio Eddie learned on what day the big shots at Warner's would look at his and Clark's tests. That morning they got there early, sneaked into Projection Room No. 3, where the tests were to be run off.

They hid themselves in the front row of high-backed leather chairs. The big shots, they knew, would sit in the back row where the telephones and the control buttons were.

Among the people at Warner's who came to see the new screen tests that day were Bill Koenig, studio manager; Darryl Zanuck, head of production; Jack Warner and Mervyn LeRoy.

They did not know the boys were there as they ran off the tests. Eddie Woods's test was approved. Jack Warner snapped, "Sign that curly-haired youngster—if you can get him cheap enough."

Next came Clark Gable's test. When it was over, Jack Warner flew into a rage. He turned to LeRoy, then his son-in-law, and demanded, "Why do you throw away five hundred dollars of our money on a test of that big ape? Didn't you see those ears when you talked to him? And those big feet and hands, not to mention that ugly face of his!"

There were more tests of newcomers run that day before Gable could escape. He congratulated Eddie Woods on his good luck on getting a contract. Eddie tried to tell him how sorry he was about Clark not sharing his good fortune. Gable merely grunted. But he readily assented when Eddie suggested he have a drink in his apartment.

After one bourbon and water highball, Gable said, "The hell with this place! I'm tearing out of here and going to New York."

Woods suggested he call up Lillian Albertson and tell her he was leaving. "She's been working harder to get you a job," he said, "than any agent could."

Gable said he felt too glum to call anyone up. Eddie got Miss Albertson on the wire for him. Reluctantly, Clark took the phone from his friend.

"Don't be crazy, Clark," she said. "Stick around for a while. I hear Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer is very interested in you. In fact, I hear you are in there!"

"I'll stick around," Gable told her. When he hung up, he muttered to Eddie, "If those words 'you're in!' turn out once more to mean 'you're out!' I'll . . ." He grimaced, unable to finish the sentence.

As usual Miss Albertson knew what she was talking about. M-G-M

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had a role for him, though a small one. It was the part of a milkman in a Constance Bennett picture, *The Easiest Way*.

Shortly afterwards, on December 4, 1930, the company whose boast later was having "more stars than there are in heaven" signed him to a two-year contract, with six-month options and a starting salary of \$350 a week. For the first time in his life Gable could count on having a weekly salary for at least a half-year. The options were with the company, which could drop him if it wished after the first six months, or the second six months, or the third.

The cruel irony of that was that Josephine Dillon, the wife without whose help he might never have learned to act, had eight months before agreed to divorce him. But the interlocutory decree had not yet become final.

"I realized that Clark meant it that time," Josephine once explained to Elza Schallert of the *Los Angeles Times*, "so I kept my word to him . . . namely, that if he ever asked me for a divorce and I felt that he really and truly meant it, I would grant his request."

Years later she told other reporters, "He told me frankly that he wished to marry Mrs. Langham because she could do more for him financially than I could."

The King Begins To Reign

CLARK GABLE was acclaimed the most sensational new performer in Hollywood almost from the day his face appeared on the screen. All M-G-M's women stars knew it, so did his co-workers, the press and the public. Everybody but the men running the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studios. They wrote him off as a flash-in-the-pan, a gangster type whom the public would tire of when pictures about the underworld lost their popularity.

Meanwhile, Norma Shearer, Joan Crawford, Marion Davies and Greta Garbo, M-G-M's biggest woman stars, were fighting to get him as their leading man.

They all won.

During his first year at the studio Clark worked in movies with each of them, besides Constance Bennett and a bewitching newcomer with platinum hair named Jean Harlow. He was in a dozen pictures in all.

The press right from the start saw what he had to offer. W. R. Wilkerson, publisher of the *Hollywood Reporter*, wrote on July 13, 1931:

A Star is in the making.
Has been made.

A star that, to our reckoning, will outdraw every other star pictures has ever developed. Never have we seen audiences work themselves into such enthusiasm as when Gable walks on the screen.

In the same month the New York *Morning Telegraph* hailed him as "Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's best box-office bet".

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In October, Harry Carr wrote in his syndicated movie column:

Every time Gable appears on the screen an electric shock runs through all the female hearts for miles around.

Women are mad about him.

His fan mail looks—for bulk—like the letters to the A.E.F. in France. Letters, passionate, adoring, swimming with emotion.

Ben Hecht recently gave his theory of what made Gable famous overnight.

Like Garbo, Gable became a symbol. He was helped greatly because he *was* the man he seemed to be on the screen. To the people of Hollywood as well as his fans he ~~was~~ the king, Mr. Mystery, as remote as a king should be, the same grand fellow he revealed himself to be on the screen.

When Gable arrived the movies had become the most vital and exciting thing in the world, the most successful thing since the Roman Empire.

He was venerated because he represented all that was glittering in that most wondrous of worlds. And he didn't louse up the mental picture the moviegoers had of him, as did Erroll Flynn and many of the others by getting drunk and wallowing in the gutter, by getting in barroom brawls and scandalous love affairs. Gary Cooper was the symbol of the West, a world that no longer existed. Clark Gable was all America at its best. This was the reason I hated to write pictures for Gable. I knew what my orders would be: In each picture Gable would have to outdrink and outfight everyone. When he went to Africa the lions had no chance against him. When I wrote *Comrade X*, I knew that when Clark Gable went to Russia as a newspaper correspondent, the Russians would have no chance against him.

He was America's dream of itself, a symbol of courage, indomitable against the greatest of odds. But he was also a human being, kind, likeable, a guy right out of the life all around the fans who worshipped him.

Gable was the American fleet sailing around the world, Pershing in Mexico, resourceful, good-looking, modest.

You did not give him speeches. The other characters made the speeches. He listened, and answered with a line.

Gable was the boy-man, without arrogance, but plenty of fire and spunk, a gay, daring, dashing blade.

As time went on, the only people who remained unaware of the magnificent box-office magnet they had found were the men running

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M-G-M. At the moment, it was true, they were distracted by problems they'd never expected to face. The Depression was threatening to wreck their industry. The coming of the talkies was forcing them to drop some of their biggest stars. They were quarrelling among themselves.

With luck at last suddenly on his doorstep, Gable could not understand the way he was being treated. He expected no privileges. What he insisted on was being treated not as a puppet, a pawn, but as a dignified human being. He was in the wrong place for that.

Even when things are going well a studio is the loneliest place in the world for a newcomer. The big people have no time for him. Because of many disillusioning experiences with other stars, M-G-M's set workers were slow in showing their friendliness. The most regular-looking guy among the actors, the boys in the crew had learned, would quickly try to convert you into a combined errand boy and personal crying towel.

Gable misinterpreted the indifference he encountered on the lot. He thought it was personal. He felt lost. Because he was approaching thirty, he knew only too well that this might be the one chance he'd ever get to establish himself. The thought of losing made him frantic.

He did not doubt his ability, though he realized it was limited. What he distrusted was his luck. He had not forgotten how confident he had been after the opening of *Machinal*, and also after getting the lead in George M. Cohan's *Gambling*.

What is fantastic is that he should have turned for sympathy to the woman he did.

The woman was Franz Dorfner.

She had moved down to Hollywood hoping to find work dancing or acting. That was shortly before he started working in *The Easiest Way*. Franz was living with her friend, Dorothy Fox, and another girl in a pumpkin-coloured bungalow on Gower Street. She did not even know her old sweetheart was in town until she ran into him on the street one day. The last time she had seen Gable was when he was in San Francisco with *The Last Mile* company. It was while watching him as Killer Mears that she realized what a fiery, exciting actor he had become.

Clark was delighted to see her in Hollywood and asked if he might visit her.

"Yes, indeed," she told him, beaming. He called a few nights later.

"How is Miss Dillon?" Franz asked him.

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Gable shook his head gloomily. "We're getting divorced!"

She blinked with surprise. During their meetings in San Francisco over the past few years he had said nothing to Franz about being married. And he said nothing now about his plan to marry an even older woman as soon as his divorce became final.

"What was the trouble with you and Josephine?" she asked when she got her breath.

"Oh, I guess most of it was my fault," he said. "Josephine is a fine woman, a real sweet woman, and she sure helped me a lot in my work. But she couldn't stop playing teacher. She was too domineering, Franz. You won't believe it, but sometimes she acted like she was Mrs. God. But as I say, most of it was my fault. Anyway, I can't stand being around *any* woman for months at a time."

Franz's mind went back to one night in San Francisco when he said, "Can't we pick up, hon, where we left off?"

"Have you made up your mind yet?" she asked.

He looked at her appraisingly for a moment, then said, "Nope!"

But Franz again could not help hoping.

Once, after Clark left, Dorothy Fox, who knew so well what Franz had suffered, said, "He's still in love with you."

That also enabled Franz to go on hoping.

She had found no one else, no one at all who could replace him in her affections. And now he needed her again. He was not always gloomy. He could be as nice as ever, "the glowing light of any group" just as in the old days. There was a piano in the bungalow and some evenings when he came he would sing with the three girls.

Clark confided to Franz on one occasion that Alice Brady had tried to seduce him. Her behaviour was just like Jane Cowl's and Pauline Frederick's, but she says, "I sat looking at him that evening, listening with mouth open and thinking, Oh you wonderful thing! Which was, I suppose, what he wanted."

More often he discussed his fears of making good. While he was working with Constance Bennett in *The Easiest Way* he complained to Franz.

"I don't think either Constance Bennett or the director knows I am alive." And he added, "You're the only friend I have in this town. I hate everybody at the studio, everybody I work with. And nobody at M-G-M likes me."

It moved Franz deeply that he should again come to her with his problems. When he got his first term contract with M-G-M he told

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her the news first and celebrated by taking her out for Christmas dinner at the Brown Derby, then Hollywood's best restaurant. He bought her no Christmas present, however. He explained that he was saving every cent in case M-G-M did not renew his contract.

But shortly afterwards he bought a new Ford. She was the first one to see it.

"And I paid cash for it," he told her. "That's more than some of them who flash around this town in big Dusenbergs can say."

Working in films, he explained, was not like being in the theatre. In the theatre the director made you feel wanted, needed, part of the team. In a studio you got orders. You were told to talk this way, wear this or that. Right in front of you, they discussed you as though you were a clothing dummy or a piece of furniture. "Move him there!" or (to the make-up man) "Can't you do *anything* about those awful-looking teeth?"

One evening he told Franz about his dream of becoming a doctor. "When I get my pile," he said, "I'm not going to stay in this cold-hearted burg for one minute more than I have to."

"Going back to the stage?" she asked.

"Not on your life! I'm going to quit acting, and study medicine. I'll go to Germany to do it. Heidelberg! That's where I'll learn to be a doctor."

Towards the end of March he told Franz that he was leaving for New York on business. He did not mention what the business was, but on March 29 he married Ria Langham there.

Franz did not see him again—except on the screen—for years. While he was rising so swiftly in the world she had only hard luck. When Clark did see her again it was because he once more needed her assistance—to clear himself of paternity charges.

When Clark with his forty-seven-year-old bride returned to Hollywood, he began to worry whether their marriage was legal or not. Josephine Dillon had not been granted her final decree until April 1, three days after the wedding in New York. They talked it over and decided to have another ceremony performed.

On hearing about this the studio strongly advised Gable against the second ceremony, pointing out that women were just beginning to show a great interest in him. Did he want to ruin his career? This time there would be world-wide publicity. What would his fans think of their hero marrying a woman old enough to be his mother?

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"I don't give a damn what they think," Gable shouted. "She's my wife and I'm proud of her. I want the whole world to know she's Mrs. Clark Gable." That June he and Ria were married for the second time at Santa Ana, California.

The second wedding made no difference to his fans, those who heard about it. By that time he was getting the biggest fan mail in the studio. Following *Dance, Fools, Dance*, he had made *A Free Soul*. In this picture Norma Shearer played the wild, reckless daughter of a famous attorney (Lionel Barrymore) who had become a drunk. Gable played a gambler and half-gangster with whom she becomes infatuated.

Lionel, in his autobiography, *We Barrymores*, told of strolling on the set and being amazed to see Clark wolfishly hugging and kissing the star. Until then Barrymore had not known that the lean, hungry-looking Gable was even in the picture, no less under contract to M-G-M. What amazed him was the nonchalance Gable displayed. He just waved to Barrymore carelessly and went on kissing a great star, who also happened to be the boss's wife.

The fact is that Gable at that moment was scared to death. But he was enough of an actor not to give himself away. The director had just told him, "Look at her with longing." He just didn't know how to do that.

He explained long afterwards, "When I looked at Norma, I didn't think of her at all, but of a thick, juicy steak! Longing for a steak and longing for a woman must make a guy look the same way because the director said 'That's great, kid!'"

Thalberg, no matter how busy, always saw the daily rushes of his wife's pictures and supervised the cutting of each scene, personally. It soon became obvious to him that unless he did something drastic this volcanic newcomer would steal the picture from Norma, something that would hurt both his wife's pride and her standing as an actress. Night after night he sat with his staff in the cutting room, ordering this scene eliminated, ordering that one remade, slicing off film in every way he could think of to make Norma's role the dominant one.

Some old-timers will tell you that the young executive has never been equalled as a film editor, and he did his best to save *A Free Soul* for Norma Shearer. But when he was finished, the glowering, mocking, smiling Clark Gable still overshadowed the star. Thalberg was a resourceful and ingenious man. After giving the matter a good deal of thought, he instructed the director to have Gable slap Miss Shearer in one climactic scene. He told Norma that this would turn the fans against

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Gable when they saw the film, and as always she would win their sympathy and love. The day the slapping scene was made, Norma kept telling Gable before each take: "Hit me harder, *harder!*" Gable didn't know what to do. "If I hit the boss's wife too hard," he said later, "I was afraid I'd slap myself out of my job."

The trick did not achieve the desired result. Instead, fan mail for the unknown flooded the studio when the picture was released. Hundreds of women who would have left their husbands for pinching them in the wrong place, wrote letters saying "I would love to be slapped by that man." There were thousands of other letters all expressing love for Gable.

There was no doubt that it was the public who was making Gable a star. It had happened only once before in all the years since film-making became a big business: with Valentino.

After *A Free Soul* there were plenty of Hollywood people who saw Clark Gable as the opposite of a flash in the pan. John Barrymore said, "He's Valentino in Jack Dempsey's body." Maurice Chevalier said, "A good actor whether he is playing a hero or a heavy role", and hoped that Gable's talent wouldn't be submerged in all the talk about his sex appeal. Bob Montgomery exclaimed, "Clark is a wow! There's no one on the screen with half his personal excitement. If you think he's big now, wait until a year from now. He'll burn 'em up!" Lionel Barrymore was another who said he had lots to offer, being a fine actor. "I'm proud that Gable is crediting me with his screen discovery."

But it was the public who made this star. Women sent him more fan mail than any of the established stars were getting. Thousands of other women waited for him to arrive at the studio in the morning and to leave in the evening. Exhibitors all over the country said their women customers were driving them crazy with pleas for more and more Gable pictures.

Everybody in and out of Hollywood had fallen in love with Gable with the exception of the men who ran Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. That would give M-G-M a new male star, and the studio had never needed one more. The coming of talking pictures had ended the careers of the company's three most popular actors, Jack Gilbert, Ramon Novarro and William Haines. In the face of all evidence they kept on insisting that Gable was a freak box-office attraction who would disappear once the public tired of gangster pictures.

It was hard to understand.

After thirty years it still is.

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They showed what they thought of their newly discovered two-legged gold mine when they lent him to Warner Brothers First National Studio for two pictures, both cheap ones. The Barbara Stanwyck movie *Night Nurse* was one; something called *The Finger Points* the other. Both were nasty, gritty parts that could have ruined any other potential star.

The studios were making fortunes lending their contract players to the other lots at high fees, but to do this with the man who overnight had become the biggest drawing card in the whole business was the wildest folly. And in Gable's case, it was exasperating to work for Warner Brothers-First National where he had heard the head man call him "a big ape".

Meanwhile, there had been other harassments.

In one of his early M-G-M pictures Gable's ears had been pinned back with fishskin, something that made him uncomfortable and self-conscious. The fishskin kept breaking, and a make-up man kept pasting his ears back relentlessly. Finally Clark could stand it no longer.

"If you don't quit plastering my ears back with that stuff, I'm gonna quit," he told Clarence Brown, the director. Brown looked at his tense, bristling face, and said, "Okay, Gable, we'll not use the fishskin."

Whenever he thought of the incident Clark became nervous. Suppose Brown had said "Okay, Gable! Quit if you want to!" Where would that have left him?

He was also handicapped by his sense of justice. He could not understand trickery, double-dealing. He did not know how to say anything else but what he was thinking. And even then, when he was just emerging from his clumsy hayseed stage, he had a deep sense of dignity. He did not mind clowning around, but he could not help protesting when someone seemed to be trying to make a fool of him.

What made Gable maddest was that while M-G-M got many thousands of dollars for lending him to Warners, he got not one penny of that fee, just kept drawing his \$350 weekly salary. He loved the fans' acclaim, of course, though he couldn't understand what had put them in such a fever. But the money that he wasn't getting kept driving him wild. "Better get it while you're hot, kid," the old-timers told him. "Grab the big buck now. In this racket you can disappear so fast that you're gone before people even begin to wonder what happened to you."

Gable was well aware of that. Haines was going to become an interior decorator. Novarro talked about retiring to a monastery,

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something he did later on, though only temporarily. Both of them had been big-money stars only a couple of years before. Gilbert had been much bigger, but the only reason he was still on the payroll was that the company lawyers could find no way to break his \$10,000-a-week contract.

By September, Clark had been in two more Crawford pictures and one with Wallace Beery. The fan mail indicated clearly that he was drawing more business than both stars put together, yet his agents had only been able to get his salary up to \$850 a week.

There was only one thing to be said for the company: Gable's timing was terrible. He should have picked another year than 1931 to become a sensation.

That was the year the country stopped believing President Hoover's comforting words about prosperity being "just around the corner". Attendance in film theatres dropped 40 per cent. Studios were teetering on the brink of receivership or bankruptcy. Paramount made only a third of what it had made the year before and in 1932 was going to lose \$21,000,000 and go into receivership, along with RKO. Fox and Warner Brothers were also floundering in oceans of trouble.

Desperate theatre owners were trying to lure in patrons with sets of dishes, old-fashioned country store nights, two tickets for the price of one. The studios were dropping every player they could spare, signing up as few as possible on contract deals. To save money they took on actors on a day-by-day pay basis. Office and other employees who belonged to no unions were laid off, right and left.

Even Loew's, Incorporated, M-G-M's parent company in New York, the soundest of all the film corporations, was going to ask its workers to take a 35 per cent cut. The bosses were even going to take pay cuts themselves, a move they considered the supreme sacrifice and one they expected to inspire office boys and stenographers to take their wage slashes with a gallant spirit. But one of them, a \$75,000-a-year movie executive, was apparently so revolted by the situation that he threw up his job to join the Christian Science movement. He did not return to the film business until talk of further pay cuts on the upper level subsided.

Gable, of course, thought the studio should reward him for helping to keep it going in such bad times, and that autumn Minna Wallis decided to take a gamble. The day after shooting started on Marion Davies's *Polly of the Circus*, in which he was playing the clergyman, Miss Wallis carried him off to a hideaway at Palm Springs.

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When Clark didn't appear, M-G-M called her office. Her partner, Ruth Collier, answered the phone and said, "Oh yes, good chaps, we know where Clark is. But he cannot come back until and unless he gets a one-thousand-dollar-a-week raise."

The trick had worked many a time. Once the picture was in production you had the company over the barrel. Every hour shooting was held up cost the studio thousands of dollars. But the trick didn't work this time.

Louis B. Mayer himself got on the phone and half-scared Ruth Collier to death. He thundered. "We've made Gable what he is and we can break him twice as fast. We'll not give in to such unethical practices if he stays away forever."

Miss Collier tried to argue, but Mayer said, "I will not be black-mailed, young lady. You tell that ingrate to be here in the studio by eight sharp tomorrow morning. If he is not here, he'll never work on this lot again—or anywhere else in Hollywood."

Meanwhile the studio's chiefs were going wild trying to think of some way of using John Gilbert in a picture so that his staggering \$520,000 a year would not be a dead loss. They finally hit on the idea of co-starring him with Jean Harlow.

Jean had been having the same sort of business troubles as Gable. The villain in her case was Howard Hughes, who had her under a long-term contract for \$150 a week and was paying her that while lending her out for \$2,500 a week.

Jean was an oddity even for a sexpot. She was a childlike creature whom the whole M-G-M studio loved. She was half innocent, half wanton. But she was also an exhibitionist. She rubbed ice on her nipples to make them swell and stand out under her dress. And she wore diaphanous costumes so that all the world could see and admire the big nipples and the dark triangle of her sex which showed through the almost transparent cloth.

The story being put together for Gilbert and the famous platinum blonde was called *Red Dust*. A brilliant ex-New York reporter named John Lee Mahin was writing it for producer Hunt Stromberg.

But Mahin, after seeing *The Secret Six*, went running to Stromberg's office. "You're crazy if you use Gilbert with Harlow," he told his boss. "I just saw this new boy, Gable. He would be terrific with Jean, couldn't miss." Mahin described Gable. "I've also seen him on the lot," he added, "he's husky, and masculine as a battering ram, but he has a woman's eyes." Mahin thought that over for a moment.

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"Maybe I should say it this way: he is a bull with a little boy's eyes."

As a team, Harlow and Gable proved a sensation. As for Gilbert, he was put into Greta Garbo's *Queen Christina*, but only because Garbo insisted on it. She had fallen deeply in love with Gilbert when they were making silent movies together, and now she felt sorry for him because everybody said he was through. She thought he should be given another chance.

He was, but the fans who had loved him in silent pictures now laughed at his squeaky voice.

The picture Clark made with Garbo during his first year at M-G-M was *Susan Lennox, Her Rise and Fall*. During the five or six weeks of shooting they said only "good morning" and "good evening" to one another.

Actually, they could have spent hours exchanging complaints about the studio's treatment of them. Garbo had plenty to be annoyed about. When she got to the studio Larry Barbier, of the publicity department, was ordered to take some cheese-cake pictures of her. This was a routine part of the build-up for all new young actresses.

Barbier, despite a lack of knowledge of Swedish, managed to convey to Greta that he wanted her to don a track suit. He then took dozens of still pictures of the Divine Swede doing the 100-yard dash, throwing the javelin, doing handstands and high jumps and broad jumps, swinging a tennis racket, a golf club and punching the bag.

Garbo thought she was going to play the role of a sweet girl athlete in some film. She was horrified when she found that the pictures were for distribution to the Sunday supplements, the *Police Gazette* and the sexier monthlies in her native country. She never forgave the studio.

In the early thirties the Misses Collier and Wallis sold Clark's contract for \$15,000 to another agency, Berg and Allenberg, who knew how to apply pressure to get what they wanted for their clients. Gable was earning \$2,500 a week in 1933, and the figure kept increasing from then on.

But what the screen idol could not forget for many a day was how tough a time he'd had as a youth. Once he told Adolph Menjou, "I still remember the day I was hungry in Butte, Montana. I was so hungry I could have eaten the ears off a steer—without salt. And cold! I was so cold I thought I'd never get warm again.

"I had a fine pigskin bag, a present from my father—which I loved above everything else. But I pawned it, bought a meal and a suit of

long underwear, and bummed a ride on a freight train to Oregon. . . . Brother, I don't ever want to be that hungry again!"

Another thing that worried Gable was the staggering cost of maintaining his home. Ria was accustomed to living lavishly and had no intention of living any other way.

The Gables were then living in a six-room home in Brentwood. It was the first real home that Gable had ever had, and much more luxurious than he really wanted. He was amazed when the studio pressed him to live more lavishly.

"Your fans expect it of you," he was told.

"If any of them care to pay my bills," he replied, "I'll live anywhere they want me to."

Ria liked having dinner parties. When Gable got the bills he all but fainted. The memory of nights when the fifty-cent blue-plate special in a cheap restaurant seemed a treat was too recent.

The fear of hunger remained with him for many years, even after there was no longer danger of his ever being broke again. And those who say that Gable was not a first-rate actor might consider *that*. Was there ever an actor who seemed cockier or less worried about anything? The deprivations he had suffered were not easy to forget. Gable never did forget them, and it is a tribute to both his craft and his character that he concealed this so well both off and on the screen.

Hotaling, who was doing as badly as most people during the Depression, remembers having dinner with him and Ria one evening. He arrived to find Gable studying his income tax. When he saw Frank, he groaned, "My God, I have to pay eight thousand dollars in income tax this year. I've just been figuring, that is far more than I ever earned in any one year before this!"

That night Gable showed Hotaling a huge box from a Beverly Hills department store. It contained dozens of belts, shirts, ties, sets of underwear, assortments of toilet articles, cuff links and tie clips.

"I'm not going to buy all of this stuff, Frank," he said, with a happy grin. "They're just samples this store sent up so I could make my selections. They do that for people who are too busy to visit their place."

Like all of Clark's women Ria loved him with all her heart, but she made the same mistake with him as Josephine had despite her greater experience with husbands. He had come to her seeming to need guidance, seeming to be helpless, and she had happily taken over the

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reins. But she never pretended that it was he who had wanted to marry her.

"It is the women who marry the men, isn't it?" she often said to friends. Adela Rogers St. John, that most perceptive of all Hollywood's women writers, once described her first meeting with Ria at a bridge party given by Mrs. Lionel Barrymore. Ria, she said, gave no interviews, received few callers and never discussed Clark. Mrs. St. John wrote:

To my surprise, I found that a tall, majestic lady in severe and elegant black satin was Mrs. Clark Gable. A dark woman, she suggests that regal and aristocratic beauty that belonged to Florence Vidor.

A determined, set, rather hard mouth she has, but her eyes are dark and sad and a little wistful.

I rather expected her to say something about *A Free Soul*, which happened to be my story and which gave Clark his first real part, as the gambler.

But she didn't. Her graciousness seems here to freeze at the thought of being interviewed or studied as the wife of the man so many women admire.

During the bridge game one of the players at her table, a charming little woman in no way connected with pictures said: "I dare say you're very tired of hearing compliments about your husband, Mrs. Gable. But I do feel I'd like to tell you what a refreshing thing it is to have him in pictures. His work is so natural and splendid."

Mrs. Gable looked at her and did not reply.

There is a world of character in her face. To me she suggests Park Avenue, the well-groomed woman of the world. She suggests the woman who has always had money, always worn smart clothes.

Becoming a star and getting into a much higher income group had disadvantages. Clark was finding that out. It was a strain being with most of his old pals. Whatever he said about his work he seemed to be boasting. When he picked up their checks in a restaurant, they regarded him as a show-off. If he didn't, they put him down as a miser.

Once Gladys Hall, the magazine writer, asked him if he had the same friends as when he was broke.

Clark told her, "No, I'm sorry to say that I haven't. It's not my fault. Somehow, my old friends, with one or two exceptions, won't come around as they used to. They seem to feel something—I don't know what it is—some strange self-consciousness or embarrassment or something. I invite them to go places with me; invite them to have

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dinner with us. Sometimes they accept—but very often they don't show up. It's one of the changes that have been forced upon me—and I dislike it intensely."

Eddie Woods was an exception, being one of the few old friends of Clark's who had made good. He was working in pictures regularly and had done unforgettable work as Jimmy Cagney's brother in *Public Enemy*.

Ria liked Eddie very much. One evening he was invited to the Brentwood house for dinner and arrived to find her alone. Clark, she said, had been delayed at the studio, but would be along in a little while. They were having a pleasant talk over cocktails when Gable came home.

It had been a hot day and he was dead tired, sweaty and irritable. Before going upstairs to change his clothes he had a bourbon highball.

"What a day!" he groaned. "I was in every single shot they made. And then, when I came out of the studio, there were about ten thousand goddammed fans waiting for me at the gate. They tried to mob me."

"You can thank God for those ten thousand goddammed fans, my dear," Ria said. "And you can just pray that they'll stay fans of yours. There are at least a hundred actors out here who are better than you. They're all eager to take your place. Those fans you complain about are all that put you where you are and kept you there."

The look Clark gave her might have served as fair warning to a less confident woman. It was the sort of thing that Gable was for ever saying himself, but he did not care for her to say it, particularly in front of his old friend.

Dr. Franklyn Thorpe, one of Gable's favourite hunting companions, early in the marriage thought Ria might be overplaying her hand. Clark complained to Dr. Thorpe of her frequent dinner parties, saying, "I never sit down to eat in my home without having at least nine sets of jawbones crunching food."

He was with Clark at an hotel bar one evening when Ria walked up and gave Gable instructions about the following night's dinner party. She said to this most masculine of men, "You must do this and that tomorrow evening. See that the butler understands perfectly everything I've said to him. Check with the florist on the flower arrangements and make sure he's sending the long-stemmed American beauties I've ordered."

Dr. Thorpe sighed in talking of this recently. "I could hardly

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believe my ears. Just as she was about to leave us, she added, 'And, honey, please try to greet our guests as though you were glad to see them.' This last was too much for Clark, I guess. He told her, wearily, 'Ria, you should know these people care nothing for me. They do not come to see me. They come to see Clark Gable, a label, a name in lights on theatre marquees. Up to a year ago I couldn't buy a job in this town or even get myself arrested. The day I lose my popularity you won't be able to get them to our house without a police warrant.' " Dr. Thorpe adds, "She listened to him as one does to a child."

Yet Ria did polish his manners and teach him how to buy clothes. She got him into a country club which previously had refused to accept actors as members. Among her close friends were Joan Crawford and Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., who were then married, and Gloria Swanson.

During those years, rumours were persistent that Gable and Crawford were sweethearts. One person who laughed at all such stories was Ria. She was utterly confident that Clark needed her too much to leave her, or to become interested in another woman.

It was while married to Ria and during his first year at M-G-M that Gable took up hunting. He liked to go off with Wallace and Noah Beery, and sometimes took his thirteen-year-old stepson, Alfred, along. The publicity department liked that and kept sending out stories about his remarkable shooting eye. But it all began the night he and Ria went to a party at the home of Dr. Thorpe and Mary Astor, who was then Mrs. Thorpe. Dr. Thorpe had a fine collection of guns in his den. After looking them over, Gable said, "Let's fix up a party, Doc."

Thorpe says, "We took our first trip to the Sierras. All we had were little sleeping bags stuffed with kapok and not much of that, just a thin layer. We slept on the ground on these with branches of trees underneath. Clark enjoyed that trip, but he didn't care for the sleeping bags.

" 'I'm not going for any more of this Boy Scout stuff,' he said, and he bought some real fine camping equipment which we used after that. Many of the trips we took were to the Kaibab Plateau, which is eight thousand feet high and on the north rim of the Grand Canyon."

The two men hunted together for several years. Thorpe discovered that though Gable was a crack shot, what he really enjoyed was the outdoor life, tramping the woods and going up mountain trails. This was his passion, not the killing. He hated, particularly, to shoot deer but somebody had convinced him that it was a public service to kill cougar because they destroyed so many sheep and cattle.

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"He was not a precision shot," says Dr. Thorpe, "but a fast shooter. He would never shoot an animal while it was standing, only while it was running. Once Clark drew a bead on a buck, then put his gun down. 'I would have got him, if the son of a gun hadn't looked at me.'"

These trips usually took about ten days and they always used the same guide, Jack Butler, a Mormon, whose wife cooked for the outfit.

"Gable," says Dr. Thorpe, "also insisted always on doing his share of the work. He would help Jack's men unharness the horses, put up the tent and skin the animals. Bob Vaughan, one of the fellows in the outfit, had a guitar. Jack would sing Western songs like 'Home on the Range', 'Red River Valley' and 'Tying Knots in the Horse's Tail', Gable loved that."

The two men hunted all over the West, north of Yellowstone Park, in Utah, Nevada and Montana. They hunted mountain sheep, bears and other wild denizens of the forest.

"Gable was the most marvellous hunting companion," explains the doctor. "He never lost his temper. We've been up to high places where the wind blew like it does in Tibet." He noticed that Gable seemed to get much more satisfaction out of being accepted as an equal by the professional hunting guides than from his popularity in Hollywood social circles. He preferred the way the guides treated him, as a man, not a star.

One year, after coming back from a trip, Dr. Thorpe learned that Jack Butler had appendicitis. "He has no money to pay for an operation," Dr. Thorpe told Gable. "And being a Mormon, it is against his faith to accept charity."

Gable's face clouded. "Here is what I want you to do, Doc," he said. "Get the doctor nearest to wherever Jack is now on the phone. Ask him who is the best surgeon they have around there, and have him operate. And I want Jack to have the best. Tell them to send the bills to me."

The following summer when Thorpe and Gable next went hunting they headed for Jackson Hole, Wyoming. From there they planned to go in the morning to Turpin Meadows, twenty-two miles away. Jack Butler's outfit and pack of bloodhounds were waiting there for them.

But setting up camp for the night in Jackson Hole, Gable complained of a cramp in his lower abdomen. "It's a little painful, Doc," he said. "Can you give me a cathartic?"

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Dr. Thorpe says, "I didn't have to do much examining. The first time I touched his abdomen I knew he had a red-hot appendix. It had flared up on him some months before. That time it had subsided under ice-pack treatment."

"No treatment is going to help you this time," Dr. Thorpe told him. "We'll have to turn right around and go home."

"And miss the hunting, after we've come all of this way?" Gable groaned.

Dr. Thorpe says, "I tried to reason with him. but it soon became obvious that I wasn't going to get anywhere just with pure logic. So I said, 'If you won't do it for yourself, do it for me.' He asked, 'What do you mean, do it for you?' 'Suppose you conk off out here in the wilds?' I said. 'Where will that leave me? I will have to get out of Hollywood. I'll lose all of my patients. I will have to start out all over again some place where Clark Gable was never heard of. That's if I can find any such place.'

" 'Okay,' he said.

"It took me two whole days to drive back. Clark was in constant pain, winced once in a while, but did not complain.

"I got him into the Cedars of Lebanon. I was going to operate next day. The night before the operation, Gable said, 'You're the surgeon, but I insist on being boss about one thing. You're not going to put an old crow of a nurse in here with me. I want a pretty nurse.'

"We got him Jean Hoffman, the prettiest nurse at the hospital. And the operation came none too soon. His appendix when it came out looked like a dirty piece of pork.

"Clark wanted to pay me for the operation, but of course I wouldn't accept a fee. Instead he gave me a watch—the finest made, a Swiss watch—a Mathe-tisot."

The watch was inscribed *To my pal—Dr. Thorpe*. The doctor wore it till it fell apart.

"I am going to Switzerland some day just to have it fixed," he says. "I wouldn't trust it in the hands of an American watch repairer. I wouldn't trust it to the United States mails. I intend to wear it again some day." And Dr. Thorpe, thinking of the friend who is now gone, wiped a tear away.

Oddly enough, the appendicitis operation was indirectly responsible for Gable achieving belatedly the top star status he had earned by his work in his first few pictures.

When he'd had the previous appendicitis attack, his doctor had

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warned him that he was overworked. He was feeling weak, anyway. Less than two weeks before the appendectomy he'd had his tonsils removed.

This time when he was released from the hospital, the studio wanted him to play in another Joan Crawford picture. Gable considered such parts "Gigolo roles", and said so. M-G-M thereupon decided to discipline him by loaning him out to Columbia for a movie called *Overland Bus*. Columbia was then a small studio, not long out of the Poverty Row class.

Gable felt they were downgrading him by sending him there. *Overland Bus* was originally a short story by Samuel Hopkins Adams, and when Clark heard the history of this property he became furious. M-G-M, his own studio, had bought the story some time before, intending to star Robert Montgomery in it. On reading the finished script M-G-M said it was not up to the big lot's standard for quality. It was palmed off on Columbia with a promise that Montgomery would be asked to star in it, but Montgomery refused to be exiled to the smaller studio.

Clark lost no time in getting to the office of chunky little Eddie Mannix, a top executive at the studio whom he recently had come to believe was a friend to be trusted.

"What a pal you turned out to be," he yelled at Mannix, "selling me down the river like this."

"I'm not selling you down the river, Clark," Mannix told him.

"What do you call it then?"

"Here is all I ask you to do, Clark," Mannix explained. "When Frank Capra, who's directing it, sends for you, just go over there to Columbia and talk to him. You'll like him, he's a fine fellow. And read the script."

Gable glared at him.

"And if after doing that, talking to Capra and reading the script, you still don't want to do the picture, just come back and tell me. I promise I'll get you out of it."

"I still think you're selling me down the river," he snapped, and left, slamming the door behind him. After Capra called, he took a couple of stiff drinks of bourbon. He was determined to like neither Capra nor the script. But he wanted to have the courage to reject all blandishments from the director, whom he supposed was like the rest of them, able to charm sabre-toothed tigers, barracuda and owls.

Capra, who had served his apprenticeship on the rough-and-tumble

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Mack Sennett lot, had been tipped off that Gable was going to be difficult. He gave Clark his best "this hurts me more than it does you" treatment, gently led him to a chair, and handed him the script. Gable, still sore, jerked it out of the director's hand, Capra said soothingly that he knew how Clark felt, but to read the story.

Gable started, and was intrigued. But it was a comedy and he had not done straight comedy before that.

"I don't know whether I can make people laugh," he said.

"You won't have any trouble," said Capra. "You did some very funny scenes with Harlow in *Red Dust* and other pictures. I'll tell you what, Clark. Let's shoot for four or five days, and then look at the rushes. After that if you want to get out of it, you can."

"By the way," Gable said, "who's the girl in the picture?"

Capra grinned. "Claudette Colbert. Paramount has exiled her to this Hollywood Siberia by way of punishment. So you are in the same boat."

Overland Bus, of course, turned out to be *It Happened One Night*. It won Oscars for Clark Gable, Claudette Colbert, Capra, and for Robert Riskin, who wrote the screen play.

These were awarded on the night, February 27, 1935, which Gable felt was the greatest of his life. But when he accepted his statuette he could only say, "Thank you." Two publicity men, John Leroy Johnston and Vance King, had to lead him from the stage.

King says, "Gable was absolutely stunned that night. As Johnston and I grabbed him by the arms and led him off the stage, he clutched the Oscar. He kept mumbling over and over: 'I'm still going to wear the same size hat! I'm still going to wear the same size hat.'"

King, now an editor on *Hollywood Reporter*, added, "And down through the years as I watched Clark Gable reign, year after year, as undisputed King of Hollywood, I realized that he had no reason to fear getting a swelled head. It just never could happen to that man."

The next time Gable saw Eddie Mannix he asked him, "What kind of reward do you want for selling me down the river?"

The tremendous success of *It Happened One Night* convinced the last doubting Thomas among the M-G-M executives that Gable was anything but a flash in the pan. From that time on he was treated like a star: had something to say about the pictures he played in, had a crew he liked to work with and, as will be seen, received financial rewards that were long over-due.

The gang he picked included Cameraman Hal Rossen, who was

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married to Jean Harlow at one time: Sug Keller as gaffer in charge of the lights; Ted Tedrick, wardrobe man whom he liked to hunt with; Larry Barbier on publicity pictures; and Lew Smith, his stand-in.

Most important of all, he got at long last the sort of salary he was entitled to as a great star. The next year, 1935, he reported an income of \$211,553 to the Government. The salaries of at least three other M-G-M contract stars were larger; Garbo made \$322,500, Joan Crawford \$241,483 and Wallace Beery \$278,749, but Gable did not complain. He was not a greedy man and they had, after all, been established stars far longer than he. He took it in his stride, something few actors manage to do.

Early in 1934 he had gone on a cross-country personal appearance tour, and taken Ria with him. It was his first visit to New York since he had played on Broadway with Alice Brady, George Brent and Glenda Farrell in *Love, Honour and Betray*.

Clark was eager to see what the old town looked like, but he did not get much chance. Women of all ages blocked traffic while he was playing at the Capitol Theatre. They fought to get in. On the street outside the stage door was another mob of fur-coated teen-agers. The police requested him not to leave between shows, which meant staying backstage from noon to midnight, and eating his meals there. For the first time since it opened, the Capitol was playing six shows a day, due to his drawing power.

When A. J. Liebling, then a reporter on the *World-Telegram*, asked Gable to explain his power over women, Clark guffawed. "This power over women that you say I have," he declared, "was never noticed when I was on Broadway. I don't know when I got it. And by God, I can't explain it."

The women rioted in every city he appeared in during that trip. In Kansas City, twenty-five hundred women, all clutching autograph books and screaming for his signature, greeted Clark at the railway station. Some of the more agile ones jumped on the tracks and climbed over coal cars to him. In one hotel he woke up to find the chambermaid in his bedroom stroking his cheek. In Baltimore a love-stricken miss took the adjoining room, watched for her chance and got into the elevator with him. There she seized him around the neck and covered his face with kisses. When he turned away, she bit his ear. In every town there were women who wanted to have a baby by him, and promised not to bother him about the child afterwards. Another girl removed her brassière and begged him to autograph it. They stole

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more than two dozen handkerchiefs from him, cuff links, his watch, several ties.

Mrs. Gable was not amused by any of this. And in June of that year she was even less amused when she found it necessary to deny reports that she and Clark were splitting up. "Mr. Gable and I," she said, "are not separated at all. We have never been and I don't think we ever will be. It is ridiculous. There has been no difficulty or disagreement between us."

The truth was, however, that their marriage was on the rocks.

Later in the year Gable took a vacation trip to South America. It was a case of New York, Kansas City and Baltimore all over again. At Santiago, Chile, women chased him into the suite of his friend Henry Moscovitz. They broke down the door, roughed up both of them, stole Moscovitz's pyjamas, combs, hairbrushes, toothbrushes, shorts, thinking they were Gable's possessions. The screen idol needed police guards wherever he went.

In November, the Gables admitted they had separated. He had moved out of the house and was living in a Beverly Hills hotel. They had agreed to a community property settlement, he said, but there were no plans for a divorce. Newspaper columnists linked his name with three women: Loretta Young, with whom he had recently co-starred in *Call of the Wild*; an English actress; and a wealthy Long Island girl, Mary Taylor. Clark denied he had ever been out with Loretta Young or the English girl, and said his romance with Mary Taylor had consisted of taking her to a hockey match.

"Yes, it's true that my wife and I have separated," he said. "But Mrs. Gable is a fine woman and whatever fault there is, blame it on me."

On September 28, they had agreed on a property settlement to become effective on December 13, 1935. However, Ria and Clark continued to see each other occasionally.

One night during the first week in February, 1936, Gable took his estranged wife to the White Mayfair Ball, sponsored by Mr. and Mrs. Jock Whitney. It was called the white ball because the ladies were supposed to dress in white costumes. Norma Shearer created considerable resentment by appearing in a red evening gown.

But Carole Lombard stole the show by arriving in a white ambulance. Dressed in the white costume of a Red Cross nurse, she was carried in on a white stretcher by two male attendants who were also dressed in white. It was the sort of crazy joke—a sight gag, as they call

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it in Hollywood—that always amused Gable. Carole's escort for the evening was Robert Riskin, who had written the screen play for *It Happened One Night*.

Gable had not seen Carole in the four years since they'd made a picture called *No Man of Her Own* together. They'd quarrelled during the shooting. She had been married at the time to William Powell, but that had ended in divorce two years before. She seemed different now, more mature and certainly more beautiful. Although Carole did not lack admirers, she had no man of her own that she wanted. Gable walked over on seeing her. He wasted no time.

"I go for you, Maw," he said.

Carole laughed. "I go for you, Paw."

"How long," asked Gable, "do you suppose it will take you to get rid of that man you came with?"

"As long," Carole told him, looking into those big grey-green eyes of his, "as it will take you to get rid of that woman you're with. I mean the one you can't make up your mind about."

Before anyone knew what was happening, they fled the party. Until that night Gable had considered the evening that he won the Academy Award as the most important of his life. But from then on, the night he met and fell in love with Carole Lombard became the most important.

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"THE older woman," Clark Gable often said when interviewers asked him to explain his first two marriages, "has seen more, heard more and knows more than the demure young girl with a pretty face and shapely figure. I'll take the older woman every time."

He stopped saying that on the night of the White Mayfair Ball. Though no one ever called her demure, Carole was twenty-seven.

They quarrelled that evening. After being out with him for less than an hour, Carole insisted on going back to the ball. "The Whitneys are throwing this ball," she said, "but I'm supposed to be the hostess." He argued that they could have much more fun alone. She agreed, but told him, "I have to get back to tell Norma Shearer what I think of her. The idea of her lousing up the whole wonderful party by coming in a red dress!"

Battles between women always amused Clark, and he drove her back. The spat between the Misses Lombard and Shearer was the high spot of the evening, but when the party was over, Carole again legged off when he asked her to go on with him from there. She had invited some of the guests to her home for breakfast. He went along, but soon left in a mood of high petulance.

In the morning, when Clark woke up, there were a pair of doves fluttering around in a cage in his hotel room.

Carole had sent them.

He telephoned her and a couple of nights later had a date with her. He came around for her in his Duesenberg convertible, of which he was

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very proud. But it rained that night and the roof of his stylish chariot leaked like an old pump. On St. Valentine's Day a jalopy painted white and decorated with big red hearts, addressed to him, was delivered at M-G-M.

Carole had sent it. She had bought it for \$60 and spent a good deal more having it painted and getting it to run. For weeks Gable would use nothing else. He told everybody that Carole had bought it for him. He was eager for the whole town to know she was his girl.

Among other things, Hollywood has been called a garden of love, but it is hard to remember sweethearts like those two. He'd been married twice, she once, but they behaved like a pair of bedazzled and love-struck adolescents who had just discovered that the opposite sex can be alluring. When they couldn't be together, they were talking about one another. You'd see them all over town, at the fights, the big premières, the football games and at Santa Anita, also at the good restaurants, laughing, holding hands, looking as though life was marvellous.

Which it was.

Russell Birdwell, Hollywood's most extraordinary publicist, has an interesting theory about why Gable's wives and sweethearts made so little trouble for him after he tired of them.

"Gable knew how to pick them," Bird says. "He picked champions except in one case, and champions don't cry or make scandals for the newspapers."

Carole, the girl he loved best, certainly was a champion. Like Clark himself, she was unique, though there was this difference: nobody in show business looked like Gable. There have been on Broadway and in Hollywood itself, dozens of slim blondes with exquisite colouring who looked quite a bit like Carole.

She was born Jane Peters at Fort Wayne, Indiana, on October 6, 1909. That name, that town, were the only ordinary things ever connected with her.

Her people were wealthy. There were imaginative businessmen on both sides of her family. One of her maternal great-grandfathers was the Cheney who helped back the Atlantic Cable and established some of the first lighting companies in California and other states. He was also a member of the first board of directors of the National City Bank of New York.

John Peters, her paternal grandfather, had brought the first washing machine to the United States from Germany and founded the Horton

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Company in Fort Wayne. Her father, Frederick K. Peters, was vice-president of Horton's.

Whatever else Carole inherited from the tycoons on her family tree, it was not a sense of decorum.

Carole was as feminine as lace panties, had a first-rate intelligence and could outswear a rodeo rider. She managed to combine class and elegance with razzle-dazzle and Rabelaisian rowdiness. She was five-one, weighed about 112, had the lightest natural blonde hair in show business. An adoring Indianapolis *News* reporter once described her this way: "She looks New Yorkish, talks Bostonish and acts very Londonish. In manner, she is brisk and slangy—an attitude which belies her fragile type of beauty."

She never forgot that the films were a business in which love and mercy are unknown. Carole could hold her own with any performer who tried to steal a scene from her, could outcream and outbitch the trickiest bitches among her competitors.

George Raft, who was a big star at the time, once refused to make a picture with Carole because she insisted on having her favourite cameraman, Teddy Tezlaff, behind the big box. She knew all the scene-stealing tricks; dropping or raising your voice suddenly to draw the audience's attention, making a sudden gesture or looking down at one's hands speculatively.

"Kiss my ass," was her favourite retort to producers who tried to tell her what to do. It is no legend that she was blistering the ears off a big shot when some visitors from out of town walked in on the set. The assistant director came running over to Carole. He said breathlessly, "Please, Miss Lombard, there are ladies present!"

Carole would go almost to any length to avoid having her gifts seem like charity. She liked to give her clothes to families with girls in school. She would get the girls and their mothers into the house, invite them upstairs, suggest that the girls try on some of her dresses, then say, "Goodness, I could never wear that now. It looks so much better on you. Do me a favour and take it, won't you?"

Another thing that made her something of a rarity among women stars was that she'd not had a miserable childhood. Carole had grown up in the sort of well-adjusted household novelists used to write books about before the psychologists identified happiness with feeble-mindedness.

When she was seven, her mother, Mrs. Elizabeth K. Peters, moved to California with Carole and her two boys, Stuart, then nine, and

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Frederick, fourteen. Papa Peters stayed in Fort Wayne, attending to business.

As a little girl, Carole was a tomboy, climbed fences, rode bicycles, wrestled and boxed with her brothers. She made up in spirit for what she lacked in size. One day Alan Dwan, a well-known silent-movie director, was thunderstruck to see a highly animated blonde beauty boxing in her front yard with a boy.

Carole was then eleven, and he put her in his current picture, *The Perfect Crime*. When it was finished she went back to school, but the experience gave her something to think about. It made school seem so dull that she left on finishing the tenth grade, as Gable had.

Carole was never an extra. Her first lead at fifteen was opposite Edmund Lowe in *Marriage in Transit*. She got \$100 a week, and picked up the name Lombard from a retired Boston banker whose family was a neighbour of hers in Beverly Hills. Carole she acquired, it is said, after reading a ten-cent book on astrology.

She worked a couple of years in Western pictures, astounding the cowboys in Buck Jones's outfit and Ken Maynard's by riding like one born to the saddle. She also discovered that film cowboys are nothing like the shy characters they portray on the screen who want to worship women from afar. Carole was a luscious, bewitching teen-ager and the boys could not keep their hands off her.

When Carole was in her late teens she was in a car accident that could have meant the end of her career. A sliver of glass from the windshield sliced a gash in her face from the corner of her nose to her cheekbone.

Rushed to an emergency hospital she was told that her beauty might be saved—if he could take it.

"Take what?" the girl asked the doctor.

"Let me stitch up this terrible gash," he took a deep breath, "without using an anesthetic."

"I can take it," she said.

The surgeon explained that an anesthetic would cause her face muscles to relax. She would never look the same again. She would never be pretty again.

She took the needle without wincing or crying out once.

When he had put in fourteen stitches, it was necessary for the surgeon to tape down her eyelids for four hours. Then for ten days she must not move a muscle in her face, he warned her. She could take her food through a straw. When friends called, Carole asked her

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mother to send them away. She was afraid to talk to them, afraid she might smile or grimace and undo all the surgeon's work. She did not want to see them anyway. After all the agony she had gone through there was a terrible scar left on her face. Her doctor assured her that it would get smaller as time went on. She would have given anything to believe him, but couldn't. She could see the disfiguring scar each time she looked in the mirror.

For nine months she remained in seclusion.

And then one day Carole said to herself, "The hell with this." She decided not only to bounce back but to get back into pictures, scar or no scar. It had grown smaller but it remained too prominent not to show up in close-ups. It got still smaller in time, but never completely disappeared.

Somebody suggested that Mack Sennett's studio was a good place to try. At that pic-throwing factory they never used close-ups. Sennett hired her and it was there that Carole met Madalynne Fields, a comedienne. They'd known each other slightly as children, but now they became friends. Later when Carole got into the big money Fieldsie, as she called her, managed her affairs.

They made a combination hard to beat. If a deal or business problem came up and she was pressed to make an on-the-spot decision, Carole would stall by saying, "Oh, I'm sorry, but I'll have to talk it over with Fieldsie. Her feelings are hurt if I do anything without her."

Adolph Zukor, the founder of Paramount who dealt with hundreds of stars, says that Carole reminded him most of Mary Pickford, who looked like an angel and had the business brain of a Hetty Green. "Carole knew exactly what she should ask for," he explained. "And how much she could get from us. But after hard bargaining when the concessions were made she never tried to take advantage."

Like all the great stars, Carole Lombard had the luck to come along at the right time. Nobody in her generation was better than Carole at portraying a dizzy dame, as she did in *My Man Godfrey*, a bedevilled, bewildered but determined housewife as in *True Confession*, or the feminine victim of fate as in *Nothing Sacred*. She proved that she could act convincingly the *grande dame* when she played the great stage star in Hecht and MacArthur's *Twentieth Century*. She could play dramatic roles, but comedy was her real gift and she could hold her own with the best male comedians, including her suave ex-husband, Bill Powell.

In 1937, the year after Gable and she fell in love, Carole had become the world's best-paid actress and the first free-lancing star to get

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\$150,000 a picture; also one of the first to obtain a percentage deal. When shooting ran behind schedule she got an extra \$10,000 a week.

It may have been the grim accident and the nine months of brooding that converted this frail creature into a human torpedo hungry for life. Carole was determined not to miss a moment of excitement or fun. She had lived the life of a party girl until she met Clark, but he hated Hollywood night life and she put that all behind her. Besides the endless competition, Gable was not going to be easy to handle. He expected, she quickly found out, an extraordinary lot from a woman. To please him you must be a gracious hostess, dress like a queen, and discuss intelligently any subject that he happened to find interesting at the moment. You had to act like a lady if he took you out, but also anything but a lady if that mood took him. It was up to you to guess his mood. As Larry Barbier put it, "He loved to hear Carole swear like a trooper, but she also had to know when that would offend his sensibilities."

It took no time to discover the feminine shortcomings that most annoyed him: phoniness, hypocrisy, saying things you did not mean, making a fuss over unimportant difficulties. He was also puzzled because Pia and many other women had not enjoyed sports and outdoor life as much as he had.

She confided all this to a woman friend who exclaimed, "He doesn't want a woman, Carole. What that guy should get himself is an All-American hermaphrodite."

What really amused and delighted her was discovering that this huge man, who looked so dignified, had so much little boy in him. Most of his objections to women's behaviour sounded much like those that eight-year-olds made about their sisters and the little girl next door.

Carole thought she could be everything he wanted of a woman, though the outdoor part of it troubled her.

One thing she was convinced of: whatever she was going to give up for his sake would be worth it. If he hated parties he would never have to go to another one for her sake. She would have cheerfully left the screen for his sake, yet Carole loved the daily hullabaloo on the set and took pride in having come so far on her own in one of the most savagely competitive of businesses. It was a thrill to her to be Miss No. 1 in Hollywood and make more money than the other film queens. As it turned out, that was one sacrifice he never required of her.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature about the life the two stars enjoyed during the next five years was that Carole succeeded with

Gable as no other woman ever had and without making a doormat of herself. He did not demand that either. In fact, he disliked obsequious, foot-kissing women almost as much as the domineering ones. Gable liked his girls to have spirit, but only to the degree he considered good. Being the girl she was, Carole could not always play it safe. Sometimes she'd fly out, swinging at him in temper.

There was the night she couldn't sleep. Waking up at three in the morning she picked up a fan magazine and in it was an interview with her beloved. He was quoted as saying that girls chased him despite all he could do to calm them down.

Carole punched the pillow, ripped the sheets and began screeching like a famished eaglet. She reached for the phone, got Clark on the line, and read the riot act to him:

"Our engagement is off, you sonofabitch. Here is one dame who isn't chasing you."

It took him quite a while to talk her back into his arms. And she could lose her temper with him when he was bragging of his sexual powers. Once he was boasting of all the strange places and situations in which he'd made love to women: in a canoe, in a telephone booth, on a fire escape. Carole was slowly working herself up into a rage.

And then he said, "I once did it in a swimming pool. You know, it's hard to do under water."

Instead of hitting him with a chair, Carole just smiled sweetly and said, "Yes, isn't it?"

That made Clark roar like a wounded lion.

"What kind of a girl are you?" he demanded. "Doing a thing like that! And then having the nerve to boast to me about it!"

Carole had got into the habit of sending him a pair of doves each time they had a quarrel, but this was one time he got no doves.

Once she heard that an actress playing in one of his pictures was telling friends she planned to take Clark away from her. Miss Lombard raced to the M-G-M lot, ran on the set and kicked the sexy-looking actress in the backside. Eyes blazing, she yelled to the director, "Get this bitch out of your picture, or I'll take Gable out of it!" The actress was dropped from the cast and a less predatory female was substituted. For a long time after that Gable boasted to his friends what a little spitfire his girl was.

Carole also kept him amused with the tricks she played on him. When he was in *Test Pilot*, playing a daredevil who could outfly, outgame and outthink Eddie Rickenbacker, Charles A. Lindbergh and

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Richthofen, the German ace, she hired a dirigible to fly over the M-G-M studio where Clark was making the picture. As the dirigible sailed over the lot Gable was handed an envelope containing a ticket for a ride in it, and a note reading, *That's the only aircraft I think you could operate safely, Ace Gable!*

And she once presented him with a ham with his picture on it. She never stopped mocking him about his hamminess. Once in talking about *San Francisco*, the picture he made with Spencer Tracy and Jeannette MacDonald, he explained, "I really love being in things like that, honey. When I'm acting stuff like that earthquake it all seems real to me, just as though it was happening."

"You're a ham, my darling," she told him.

She was ruthless in teasing him about his performance in the title role of *Parnell*, his one flop until then.

Like most actors, Clark was a very poor judge of picture material. He had not wished to do any of his three biggest hits, *It Happened One Night*, *Mutiny on the Bounty*, or *Gone With the Wind*. He objected to playing Fletcher Christian in *Mutiny* because the role required him to wear knickerbockers. "With my knobby knees," he said, "I will look ridiculous."

And he was not confident that he could master an English accent which would sound genuine, particularly in scenes with the Englishman, Charles Laughton.

He was reluctant to play *Gone With the Wind* because he thought that the millions of movie fans who had read the novel would have a fixed idea of Rhett Butler and would be disappointed no matter how he played it. This, though thousands of fans wrote the producer, David O. Selznick, insisting that Gable would make a perfect Butler. Fans suggested a score of actresses as their favourite candidate for Scarlett O'Hara, but Gable they elected unanimously.

Most fans think that Gable gave his greatest performances as Fletcher Christian and as Rhett Butler, the very roles he doubted he could please them in.

Eddie Mannix, the M-G-M executive, has an interesting explanation of why Gable was so bad in *Parnell*.

"Clark," he says, "after he became a star was the name player who gave directors the least trouble. He felt that the director was the captain of the ship and that it was his job, as a member of the crew, to take the captain's orders. He could be talked into doing things if you could convince him what you wanted made any sense."

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"He was always Clark Gable in his pictures, whether he was playing a gambler, a gangster, a test pilot, a lawyer or a minister. But he must have been both Gable and also the man he was portraying, because after you saw fifty feet of any Gable picture you were convinced that he was that character, and that the character was a living man.

"All directors of Clark's pictures understood this. But John Stahl, the director of *Parnell*, was a stubborn man. He decided he would be the first director to prove that Gable could play something beside himself. Stahl had just broken down the resistance of Irene Dunne to playing the big scene in *The Magnificent Obsession* his way. It had not ruined the picture and this convinced him that he could play Svengali also to Gable.

"I was a little apprehensive. John Stahl, whom we called 'the grey-haired old bastard', was not Clark's type of director at all. Clark worked best with fellows like Victor Fleming, who was an outdoors, free-swinging chap like himself.

"During the first few days of shooting, on running into Clark on the lot I would ask, 'How is the grey-haired old bastard treating you?' He replied, 'Never better, Eddie. Things are going great.'

"But after *that*, oh, oh, oh! Stahl tried directing Clark so he would be more Parnell than Gable. Clark argued against being directed in a way he instinctively knew was wrong. But Stahl was captain of the ship, and in the end Gable gave in.

"The result was a God-awful picture and the only failure Clark made for us in all of the years he was an M-G-M star."

(Mr. Mannix must be pardoned here for fibbing a little. As far as can be learned, except for *Parnell* all of the pictures Gable made before he joined the Army in 1942 were successes, but it was quite a different story after 1946 when he came back to M-G-M to resume his career.)

After *Parnell*, whenever Clark was in a role he felt chesty about, Carole would send a plane to drop leaflets on his studio in Culver City saying things like:

If you think Gable is the world's greatest actor see him in *Parnell* You'll never forget it. I'm not going to let him forget it either.

If Parnell was as woozey a goof as Gable portrayed in the picture, Ireland *still* wouldn't have her freedom.

All this clowning delighted Gable for the thing about Carole's joking was that she knew when to stop. She could read him like a book

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and she understood him as only a woman who loves a man with all her heart can.

But one thing worried her. "Clark is a different guy since you became his girl," one of his hunting friends told her one day. "When we used to go out he hated to come back. Now he gets restless before we even get there. He can't get home to you soon enough."

For a long time Carole didn't know what to do about it. She knew how much getting away from Hollywood meant to Clark. For there were things about the place that he could hardly endure: the lying and the boasting, the vulgar exhibitionism, the jockeying for position, the bad manners, the double-crossing and throat-cutting that he saw going on all around him.

Tiresome to him was the endless squabbling over details and credits, the organized spying, the daily clash of egos. Sometimes it seemed that getting the job done and done right was far less important to the directing geniuses and producers than the question of who would be rewarded for the hits and blamed for the errors.

To an honest craftsman like Clark all this was both stupid and irritating. The fact that the people responsible for creating so much unnecessary confusion were intelligent robbed them of all excuse for their preposterous manoeuvrings which cost the company a fortune every year. This was one reason he respected and trusted both Eddie Mannix and Howard Strickling, who were company men first, last and always.

Once he reached the top himself he was grateful for the big money and the fame and the good living Hollywood gave him, but the town's gods were not his gods. Its standards for personal behaviour were not his.

Carole, more worldly, smarter, had little tolerance for that side of the business either. But she could live with it, laugh it off most of the time. Clark, however, through bad times and good, remained a small-town man at heart, shrewd and self-centred as most, but with a rigid code that he had to live by.

He needed those holidays, those days and nights in the woods, to feel alive, to breathe, to have his own kind of people around him.

She would have liked to go with him, but she'd never hunted or fished in her life. In addition, she had a health problem that few people were aware of.

Carole Lombard, the inexhaustible "Hey! Hey!" cutie pie on the set, would be so tired some nights on leaving the studio that she would cry from sheer exhaustion. She had contracted malaria on a vacation

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to Honolulu a few years before and was still weakened by it. When working, she had dinner in bed and would try to get to sleep by eight-thirty.

Carole had undertaken one of the most difficult of all human tasks: giving back to a man the youth that he should have had as a teen-ager. And if she was spoiling his between-picture excursions she felt she was failing him.

The more she was with Clark the more she loved him. To her, as to his fans, he was the spirit of America, the best it had produced, a virile man of good heart and superb mental manners, a rare fellow that no corruption could besmirch or tarnish. He was incapable of cruelty. She would have liked to have thought him incapable of meanness, as well. She was distressed by his concern about money, but was able to excuse it. Carole knew what a long, terrible struggle he'd had to become even self-supporting, and that the fear of waking up some morning broke and hungry still haunted him. She was also aware that his wife Ria had made up her mind either to get him back or make him pay a price for his freedom that would strip him.

It now developed that Ria was not going to be satisfied with the community settlement involving \$265,000 in property that he had made with her in November, 1935. Mrs. Gable gave every indication that she was going to ask for much more before giving the divorce he would have to have before he could marry Carole.

Carole would have been pleased if she could have heard what David O. Selznick, producer of several of her pictures and also Gable's greatest movie, *Gone With the Wind*, had to say about Clark's attitude towards money.

"It never came to my attention that Clark was stingy," said Selznick recently. "It is true that I did not know him personally, though I knew him for twenty-five years. Very few Hollywood people indeed knew him any better, however.

"But there is one thing I will say. Clark was never greedy. Once you made a deal with him, that was it. He never asked or expected anything extra. He was not small. There was nothing small or mean about him."

Unlike most of the other stars, Clark did not like his name to be used for advertising. Once he did allow the Dodge Motor Company to present him with one of their station wagons, and posed for pictures beside it, but the next year when the Dodge company wanted to give him another station wagon, he refused the gift.

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"I'm no damn car salesman," he told Larry Barbier, his publicity man.

For a while Frank Hotaling was his stand-in. Hotaling's experience in this job offers a good illustration of how the star's generosity and kindness almost always stopped short of cash contributions.

In 1935 someone told Gable that his old friend was broke. The blessings of FDR's Administration and New Deal had not yet reached him, and for Hotaling and many other persons the Depression was not over.

Frank had no phone and Clark went to a lot of trouble to find him. He checked with mutual friends, with agents, and was about to quit when it occurred to him to call Stanley Rose's bookshop on Hollywood Boulevard. Frank in the old days had enjoyed hanging out there, though Clark himself had never cared for either the place or the proprietor. Mr. Rose, an eccentric, had a habit of taunting Gable with having married Josephine for her *money*. Rose knew that Josephine had no money but the idea amused him.

Though such genuine literary lights as Gene Fowler, Budd Schulberg, William Saroyan and Jim Tully sometimes could be found around the place, Gable avoided the store. He hated even to phone there. One never knew what idiot would answer the phone and pretend it was the Japanese consulate, Larry's fish market or Madame Frances's high-class call house. However, he was concerned enough about Hotaling to give the bookshop a ring.

Stanley Rose, after making a few annoying personal remarks, told Clark that Hotaling sometimes dropped in. A few days later, Hotaling called Gable and accepted the job as stand-in. It paid \$45 a week and Frank said he was glad to get it.

The first picture he worked in was *Call of the Wild*, for which 20th Century-Fox had borrowed Clark as Loretta Young's co-star. Hotaling says, "There was to be one shot in this picture in which only Gable's hands and wrists were to be shown as he panned for gold. Clark said I could do it. But when I tried, the director said 'No good!' My wrists, which are of normal size, were only half as big as Gable's. He had grown big all over since we were extras together, his neck, legs, arms, had all become huge. It was almost as though while putting on weight his frame and his whole bone structure had grown also.

"Clark had had no trouble getting into my tuxedo a few years before. But he would have found it impossible in 1935. In fact, he once

gave me a couple of his suits. They were fairly new, but were too big for me, and I had to have them altered."

Hotaling worked as Gable's stand-in for more than a year. It was the custom for stars to give these ill-paid shadows of theirs some extra money each week, as well as Christmas presents and other gifts. Hotaling got no money and no gifts from his old friend.

"He worked with Wallace Beery and Greta Garbo in pictures early in his career," says Hotaling. "The boys at M-G-M told me that neither Garbo nor Beery ever gave presents to the crews they worked with. They taught Clark that it was unnecessary to tip anyone, and he took the lesson to heart. It is possible, though, that he just didn't think of it. And if he did think of it, he then thought better of it."

Before long, Carole solved quite simply the business of his failure to give presents to the crews. She got the names and addresses of the people who worked with him on each picture and sent them all presents in his name.

Larry Barbier recalls going up to Clark one Christmas and thanking him for the beautiful bathrobe he'd just received. Gable looked startled for a moment, then said with a grin, "Oh, did I give you a bathrobe?"

Larry Barbier also tells how Gable had spent about \$1,500 on the white car with red hearts that Carole gave him—eight fancy new tyres, a V-8 engine, special steering equipment and other costly gadgets. After a while he had it painted black.

"He got a belt out of passing Cadillacs and Lincoln Continentals in that old rattle-box," says Barbier, "but after eight months or so he became bored with it. Ford dealers offered him a couple of thousand dollars for it. I suppose they planned to paint it white with red hearts and put it in their show window on St. Valentine's Day."

"Clark turned down the offers. But when I went out to his house, I would see it standing around in the yard. One day I told him, 'I have a kid of sixteen going to high school. I have to buy him a car. What about that Ford of yours? Will you sell it to me?'"

"Hell, no," the actor said. "Do you think I want him to wrap it around some telephone pole and kill himself?"

Larry didn't argue. Gable's associates had learned not to. Once he made up his mind about something that was usually it; he did not change. That night, when he told Carole about the conversation, she nodded as though she approved of the stand he'd taken.

But one morning a few weeks later Carole said to him, "Papa, you stingy old bastard, haven't you give that car to Larry's kid yet?"

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That afternoon Clark told Larry that he wanted to have lunch with him the next day. After lunch, he said, "Have you a buck on you, Larry?"

Barbier answered yes.

"Well, hand it over."

Barbier did and Clark handed him the owner's licence for the Ford.

"That was just like Gable," says Barbier. "He didn't mind giving away the car, but he wasn't going to pay the buck he'd put out for the owner's licence."

Gable was also most generous while he was in a film directed by a man whom no one on the set liked. On those days, somebody's birthday, the birth of a baby, Christmas, an elopement, the end of the picture, were all celebrated by parties on the set. No one, though, would have thought of giving this disliked director a party except for the fact that the director working on the adjoining sound stage had just been given a party.

Such parties cost about \$200, and Gable, the first one approached, gave \$25. But there was not one other person working on the picture would kick in with a dime. In the end, the script girl who was collecting the money brought back Clark his \$25.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

When she explained the situation, he said, "We can't do that to the man on his birthday, even if he is a stinker." And he dug down into his pocket and gave her the \$175 she needed. The people that didn't contribute of course did not carry their ill will to the point of not attending the party.

Clark was always going out of his way to praise co-workers. If one of them was doing an exceptional job he took the trouble to tell the front office about it. Many of the set workers got better jobs, bonuses and pay rises because of Clark's recommendations. Very few other stars took any such trouble to help the people who worked with them day after day. And later on, he helped young actresses who played with him, actresses like Lana Turner, Ava Gardner and Grace Kelly, to become big-money stars by insisting they be given the same billing as he got. He always praised good work by his supporting cast.

They loved him for being what he was. One day one of the electricians arrived at the set late. His car had broken down. Clark went out with him to the parking lot and fixed it.

He was one of them, and they knew it. His dressing-room door was always open. One didn't have to knock as with the other stars.

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You could go into his dressing-room and find him talking about guns or hunting with Ted Tedrick or one of the prop men. On the set he would stroll away from Mayer and the producer of his picture to talk with Larry Barbier or one of the other boys of the crew. *p*

Bob Perry was a famous old extra in Hollywood. He and his wife had lived near Clark and Josephine. Bob's chief pride was that he had attended every world championship fight since 1910. He and his brother ran a restaurant but Bob kept right on working as an extra. One day Clark happened to see Bob Perry in the commissary sitting with some other extras. He went over and sat with him and reminisced about old times.

"I kept worrying about the sonofagun," says old Bob Perry, who is now nearing eighty. "I kept saying, 'Clark, Mr. Mayer is looking over here. He looks sore. I think he wants to talk about something with you.' Clark just laughed, and said, 'Oh, we see each other every day in the week. But when the devil will I have another chance to see Bob Perry again!'

"Then there was the time Mrs. Perry and I were invited to a big party given by Louella Parsons, another old friend. The place was jumping with stars—Marion Davies, Norma Shearer, everybody you ever heard of. Clark was there with Carole Lombard.

"The missus and myself were about the only people of little importance at that party. But soon Clark spies us and over he comes with Carole. He puts his arms around my wife, kisses her and admires the dress she has on. And Carole hugged us both. Clark made me tell a couple of stories about things that had happened back at Red Scovall's garage when we played together in the ante-poker game there."

Gable never lost his modesty. There was little that aroused his disdain more than seeing other stars lording it over less important people. Once he and Larry Barbier walked by a set just as a top star was staging a tantrum.

As they walked on, Gable said to Barbier, "Do me a favour, Larry. If I ever start acting like that will you please kick me in the butt?"

"I promised to, and would have," said Larry, "but it never became necessary."

He never commented on politics or world events. He was a Republican and gave money to various Presidential campaigns, but he did not care to discuss such matters. Often it was lack of interest. But more often it was because he didn't consider himself qualified.

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Once someone asked him what he thought of the atomic age. "I dunno," said Clark, "I'm an automobile man myself."

Some of the actresses he worked with angered him by showing displays of temperament. Greer Garson, for example, who played with him some years later in *Adventure*, annoyed him rattling the bracelets she wore.

Joan Crawford, columnist Whitney Bolton recalls, was making a picture with him in which they had to take some scenes at a beach. To her annoyance they had to shoot through the week-end. She complained to Clark. "I bought wonderful new clothes so I could go to the opera in San Francisco on Saturday night with friends." And she described the clothes.

Gable, bored and with a little bit of a hangover, turned to Bolton and did a mocking imitation of Joan. "Whitney, I have brand-new dancing pumps, a Sulka white tie, a gorgeous dress shirt, blue plush suit, a pea-green opera cloak and where am I? At the opera, no. Down here in this very, very unsocial Pismo Beach. Yes."

In telling the story, Bolton says, "I was shocked, and that illustrates his kindness, I think. The reason I was shocked was that it was Clark Gable talking. Any other star talking like that would not have surprised me. But I'd spent a lot of time with him and Carole. That was the first and the only time I ever heard him say or do anything that was even ungracious."

One of the first things Clark did on becoming established in pictures was to start looking for his father. He had only heard once from the old man since their angry parting in Oklahoma. That was after he opened in *Machinal*. Will Gable heard about it through the Dunlaps and wrote Clark a letter of congratulation. He addressed it care of Actors Equity, New York, but wrote no return address on it. Clark had written him since that, again and again, but each letter had been returned, stamped NOT KNOWN AT THIS ADDRESS.

Eager for a reconciliation, Clark started his search again late in 1931. He was sure that his father had not struck it rich, and wanted to know that he needed nothing.

After several months, Clark located his father on a farm in North Dakota where the old man was working as a hired hand. But the old fellow was still stubborn. It took Clark a whole year to get him to Hollywood, where he was able to take care of him in good style. Soon after he came out, Mr. Gable Senior married Mrs. Edna Gable,

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the widow of his brother Frank. He was not unhappy being retired and when Clark and Ria were married his father and new stepmother had dinner there very Sunday night.

The Brentwood place was handsome, but if Will Gable was impressed he did not mention it to Clark. Every time they were alone, he would repeat his old plea.

"Why don't you get out of this foolish acting business? We could go back to the oil fields, kid, and hit it rich, working together like we used to do."

When Clark said he was making over \$4,000 a week, his father would chortle, "That's just 'whistling and tobacco-chewing money to what we can earn back there in Oklahoma once we get going. And you'll feel like a man again, kid, once you start doing man's work."

Clark built a house for him near his own. Stubborn Will Gable spent his last years puttering around the ranch at Encino where his son lived the happiest part of his life. Shortly before Old Will died, Clark complained to Louella Parsons, "My father will hardly let me do a thing for him. He had the worst old car. I was afraid the wheels would come off some day, but every time I suggested buying him a new one he had a fit. So I bought a car the same colour for him which he liked. Now I don't worry so much about him being hurt because his car fell apart."

Will Gable died in the late forties without ever uttering the words of praise his son was so hungry to hear.

The readers of the endless fan magazine stories and newspaper feature stories written about Gable when he first flashed into prominence were impressed by the small amount of nonsense in them, considering that he was being hailed as "the world's latest and greatest human heart-throb". A good reason was his 100 per cent honesty in answering embarrassing, and sometimes painful, questions. Often he said nothing but sent the interviewers away thinking they had a story. Usually, they were out of the studio gates before they realized they'd come away with an empty notebook. This was because Gable was so genuinely interested in everyone he met that the interviews in these cases were in reverse: he asked the questions. This was no trick. He really wanted to know what made the other fellow tick.

Also the innate decency in him always got through to interviewers. Yet there was some nonsense, of course. One fan magazine in 1931 asked **HOW MANY MARRIAGES FOR CLARK GABLE?** and answered its

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own headline with rumours that there had been four. Asked about Josephine, it quoted him as saying, "Dillon? Dillon? Josephine Dillon? I don't believe I know the lady."

A couple of years later, another fan magazine lamented his imminent disappearance from the screen under this headline and sub-head.

LOST! THE GABLE WALLOP!
Clark Sits Up Through the Night
and Thinks About Himself!
Has Too Much Introspection
Robbed Him
of His Force and Punch?

There was also an interview about a girl who had written a fan magazine story about a torrid love affair she'd had with Gable years before he became famous. A writer for *Golden Screen*, another fan magazine, questioned him about this "carthy tale, with a subtle glamour of emotion deified by hunger and given reality by mutual helplessness. It was the kind of story that men of delicate reticences . . . do not reveal."

Gable told *Golden Screen* that the story was true. He was no different from other men, he said, and he hoped that his ex-sweetheart got paid for kissing and telling on him. He regretted only that she had not come to him or Mrs. Gable if she needed money that badly. "She would have got it," he said, "and there would have been no need to humiliate herself by giving out such a story."

M-G-M had never made any special efforts to publicize Clark in the early thirties despite his world-wide popularity. But after *Photoplay*, in December, 1913, ran an interview with him written by Ruth Biery, they decided to "protect" him from interviewers. Among other statements, Gable told Miss Biery:

"My advice has never been asked about a picture. I have never been consulted about what I'd like to play. I just work here . . . the company has an investment in me. It's my business to work, not to think . . . I read in a paper that I was going to play *Susan Lennox*. I walked on the lot one day and was told I was to play *Red Dust* in place of John Gilbert."

There were fewer interviews with Gable after the studio started to protect him. Gable did not care much one way or the other.

Howard Strickling, for many years the head of the publicity department and now also vice-president of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer,

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was one of the best friends Gable ever had. Strickling and Eddie Mannix, as a matter of fact, were about the only close friends of his who were in the film business. What Clark and everybody else respected most about Strickling was his complete devotion to the company where he had worked throughout his business life. Strickling was also a confidant to be trusted utterly in a town where anyone's innermost secrets might appear in Louella Parsons's or Hedda Hopper's column any morning.

Because of his job Strickling came to know stories about the stars and M-G-M bigwigs that could have quickly ruined most of them. He knew their secret vices, the location of their love nests, the names of their sweeties, which women stars had been whores or kept women as young girls, which ones liked girls better than men. No secret detrimental to M-G-M, or the people it employed, was ever leaked by this extraordinary publicity man. The shocking truths were as safe with him as with a priest.

Down through the years the M-G-M publicity department had to protect the company's stars and executives from exposure for every sin and crime, and protecting Gable was about as difficult as protecting Helen Hayes or Maude Adams would have been.

Clark took his loves where he found them. They included scores of waitresses, stenographers and other females. The proof of their loyalty to him came many years later when *Confidential Magazine* tried to get material for an exposé about his sex life.

Most of the scandal about Clark Gable, and there was precious little of it in the thirty years he was a star, originated in the addled heads of publicity seekers.

In 1935, rumour has it that a girl who met him on a ship *en route* to South America threatened to make trouble for him and had to be paid off by the studio. But that is only a rumour.

During that same year an evangelist preaching, in of all places, the Methodist Church in Hopedale, where he had gone to Sunday school and sung hymns as a little boy, denounced him for "serving a devil of lust" and added that he had caused "millions of girls and women to fall all over each other . . . to see him in voluptuous love scenes". At a Hopedale Parent-Teachers meeting he charged that "when a youngster goes to the theatre to see the famed Clark Gable he is mingling in the society of Hollywood stars who glorify perverted love. . . ."

That summer, the evangelist came to Hollywood with the announced purpose of seeking Gable's redemption. Clark happened to be

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away at Catalina Island where he was working in *Mutiny on the Bounty*. The evangelist said he would go there, but first he made a courtesy call at the Culver City studio, where he was handled with care. The studio could not afford to antagonize a religious sect and no more bleats of outrage were reported in the press after the good man walked out of M-G-M's gate.

Not long after this episode Clark began to get a series of letters from a woman in England who said he was the father of one of her children. Soon she moved to Winnipeg, Canada, and continued writing them from there. For some reason Gable did not take the letters seriously enough to mention them to the studio.

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer first learned about the threat to its greatest asset when a Los Angeles lawyer and a private detective called at the studio. They said that Clark's British inamorata and the illegitimate daughter, now fifteen, were in town and ready to expose him as a heartless and villainous character unless they got \$100,000.

Strickling promised to talk to Gable about the matter. On being questioned, Gable let out a howl that could be heard in Kansas City. "If that little girl was my kid," he demanded hotly, "can you imagine me not taking care of her?"

Gable had kept some of the letters, and investigation revealed that the Englishwoman had several older illegitimate children. A birth certificate for the girl in question had been issued in Essex, England, on July 23, 1923. This document stated that the father of the girl was a British bookkeeper who had not married Gable's accuser until two years later.

The information was turned over to the authorities. Gable told them that he had been in Oregon and engaged to Franz Dorfner during the autumn of 1922. He had never been in England. He was asked if Miss Dorfner would testify for him.

"Of course she would," Gable said. "So would any member of her family."

"What happened to the engagement?"

"Well," Clark said, "Franz and I drifted apart."

"What makes you so sure that in view of that the Doerfers would testify to help you clear your name?"

"They're good people," he said. "They would not lie for me. But they would tell the truth for me—or anyone else."

"Would this girl you were engaged to testify?"

"Of course."

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"After you threw her over?"

"What makes you think I threw her over?"

"You must have. No one ever heard of a girl walking out on Clark Gable."

They finally found Franz in the last place in the world one would have looked for her. All the time Clark was going up and up in the world, she'd had little but hard luck. During the Depression the family's beautiful farm had been taken over by a bank. Her father, Martin Doerfler, had died with a broken heart. Franz had gone to work in a blouse shop in Hollywood which soon closed due to lack of business. She'd had several bouts of illness. She, the girl who had never cared to work in her mother's kitchen, had then become a cook.

For a time she was cook in the home of Terry Hunt, the physical trainer, and now was working, of all places, in the kitchen of Bert Allenberg, Gable's agent! She told the investigators that she was treated well and paid well, but sometimes the Allensbergs entertained as many as fifty dinner guests. On such occasions she would be in the kitchen for as many as seventeen hours at a stretch.

On learning of this, M-G-M decided to put her under contract—possibly knowing it would sound better in newspaper accounts of the trial if Franz were to be called an actress rather than a domestic.

When asked whether she would testify to help clear her old sweetheart of false charges, Franz looked as astonished as Gable had been.

"Of course," she said. "I know he was not in England during the autumn of 1922."

Josephine Dillon, the wife he had left after she'd helped him so much, was also eager to help.

With two men, against whom charges were later dropped, the Englishwoman, in April 1917, was tried for conspiracy and attempts to defraud through the mails in the Los Angeles Federal Court. Gable's father made one of his rare public appearances at the trial. He testified that his son had never been in England in his life. Besides Franz, persons who had worked with Clark in the Meier and Frank Department Store, in Oregon lumber camps, and at the Portland Telephone Company testified for the Government. When Franz was called, Clark stepped forward to lead her to the witness stand. He kissed her and said, "It's good to see you again."

The press gave its readers a good time retelling the Englishwoman's story, complete with Cockney accent. Both in court and her press

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conferences the lady was a smasher. But the idea of the handsome Mr. Gable wooing and winning her seemed grotesque. One could not imagine them having what the English themselves call a bit of the old slap and tinkle.

"Mr. Gybles," she said, "I knew then as Frank Billings. Gybles overheard us quarrelling one time, and that started the association I had with him.

"We were neighbours in Essex, England, in 1922 and 1923. I had two acres and a bungalow, and he had the same. There were about three acres and a hedge between our homes. He kept chickens—usually at my place during the time when he wasn't in London.

"This ere Clark Gybles is an arrant fraud," she explained to reporters. "E's Frank Billings, that's oo 'e is, I can tell by the way he mykes love to that Joan Crawford—just the syrne as 'e did to me.

"E often kyme to see me, that 'andsome young fellow did. I even hired 'im to tutor me first-born 'oo 'ad a gash in 'is head and couldn't go to school. Five shillings a week I gyve 'im. I did.

"I wasn't married to me 'usband, you see, and there was a most incessant row atween us. So one d'y this Billings, or Gybles, as 'e calls hisself now, 'eard us.

"E waited till me 'usband went and then he cyme in, and he says, says he, 'I been lovin' you all along.'

"I was a looker then, mind ye, but I was ten years older than 'im, so I told him to go along. But 'e grabs my wrist, and turns the key in the door, and there he was. And it wasn't the only time, either.

"So I didn't know a thing more of 'im, until me first-born saw him on the screen. 'E come 'ome and 'e says, 'Mother, I saw your fairy prince in the pictures.' That's what I call 'im, you see, my fairy prince.

"I went to the pictures and sure enough it was 'im. So I wrote him a letter friendly-like, askin' 'im wouldn't he like to give me some money to make an actress of her."

The photographs published of "her" caused the public to laugh rather than feel sorry for her. She was ten years older than Gable. She was shapeless, toothless and obviously a victim of a delusion. The indictment brought by the U.S. Post Office Department was based primarily on a letter she had written Gable from Winnipeg on March 30, 1936. It read, in part:

You loved me. You remember the day when I sent dear little Eric up to you with a note to ask you to come down . . . and you came holding little Eric's hand and you hid under the old maid

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All the naughty star couples did, excepting one pair who couldn't; the man had been trying for years to get free of a wife he'd wed in New York when a mere lad. She always refused for religious reasons to divorce him and refused now to change her mind because of the Hays office.

On December 14, 1914, within days of the appearance of that issue of *Photoplay*, Gable announced he was going to ask Ria for a divorce.

Ria didn't give up easily. Among other things she told Clark she would have preferred to hear the news from him, not from the papers. But the following month she was in Reno for the divorce and giving out a polite statement.

In Hollywood, Clark was also being polite. He told reporters, "I regret bitterly that a short time ago a story was printed to the effect that I would seek a divorce from Mrs. Gable. Mrs. Gable and I had a fine life together until the time came that we both realized we could no longer make a go of it. After years of separation it is only natural that Mrs. Gable should institute proceedings that will assure her freedom."

And even after that Ria tried to hang on somehow to the husband newspapers called "The world's greatest heart-throb."

She told reporters, "Clark knew he could have a divorce any time, since we ironed out our little differences some time ago. But he never seemed to want one. I think a marriage between a cinema star and a society woman has a better chance of succeeding than one between two stars."

Early in March Ria obtained her divorce. She told the court that Gable had deserted her back in October, 1914. "He said he was going to South America. When he came back he said he wanted to try it alone. He said he wanted more freedom. After he returned he came to the house several times to talk to me but he never offered to return to the marital state."

A while before, Ria told one of her friends:

"He's a businessman as well as a movie star. A great guy, Mr. Gable. He knows one must be businesslike about these things. It's only fair. I gave him a good many years of my life and taught him a great deal."

Clark was working in *Gone With the Wind* when Ria got the divorce. He and Carolc were married at Kingman, Arizona, the first day he had off. That was March 29, 1914. Reverend Kenneth Engle of the First Methodist Episcopal Church, in Kingman, officiated.

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After a little champagne party in the local hotel the newly wedded pair went upstairs to their bridal suite. Gable seemed restless and embarrassed, kept walking up and down.

"What's wrong, Paw?" asked his bride.

He fidgeted a bit, and then said, "Got any money on you, hon?"

Carole said, "Why? Yes."

"How much?"

"How do I know—eighty dollars—a hundred dollars—a hundred and twenty-five. Why are you asking about it?"

Again he fidgeted. "I gave the little man who married us a hundred dollars. That's all the money I have."

"In your pocket?"

"No, in the world."

"Did you have to give it all to Ria?"

He nodded glumly. "Every dime I had—more than a half-million all told." Carole took him in her arms and said rapturously, "You silly son-of-a-bitch, you paid half a million dollars for me!"

The Big Man Grows Bigger

GREATER LOS Angeles, that biggest of all municipal mushrooms, has many run-down neighbourhoods. But one of them, Culver City, the home of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and other film studios, never deteriorated. The reason is simple. It had a completely run-down look the day it was built. It always had stores no one would rent, not even gypsies. Others had rusty fronts, unwashed windows, scanty stock. Culver City's homes have the distinction of old-fashioned Coney Island type bungalows.

In the midst of all this ugliness stand two handsome structures; neither is at M-G-M, which for decades spread around the world so much glamour and beauty. For many years the whole studio resembled a junkyard. Some said this was because its big boss, Louis B. Mayer, had been a junkman in his youth and felt at home only in decay and dismal surroundings.

One of Culver City's two good-looking buildings is the Helms Bakery, the other is a replica of Mount Vernon. In the late thirties this was the Selznick International Studios. *Gone With the Wind* was filmed there and the beautiful white building was Tara, the home of Scarlett O'Hara. It was behind that edifice that Carole Lombard staged some of the antics which amused Clark Gable, even though they drove David O. Selznick almost out of his mind.

In most of these she had the wholehearted co-operation of Russell Birdwell, a crack Hearst reporter whom Selznick had hired recently as his head publicist. Carole, who was by then getting that staggering \$150,000 per picture, plus \$10,000 a week if shooting ran overtime,

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bounced between her dressing-room and the sound stage aboard a scooter, but that was before she discovered a red fire engine on the lot that she could use. She and her co-star Fredric March took to spending their lunch hour racing it all over the studio, with fire bell clanging and siren screaming. After contemplating these mad caperings, the studio manager placed a night and day guard at the studio pool to guard a miniature yacht which was being used in *Nothing Sacred*. One of his spies had overheard Carole and March plotting to set fire to the little boat as a test of the fire engine's equipment.

Mr. Selznick tried not to brood over what would happen to the film they were making if the speeding fire truck ran into anything more substantial than a frankfurter stand. He also managed a hollow laugh the day Miss Lombard inspired the working crew to put her director, Wild Bill Wellman, into a strait jacket and keep him there for several hours.

But he did lose his temper the day he came to the studio and found nobody there except the watchman. "What the hell's going on?" he asked.

The watchman said, "The mayor declared a special holiday today."

"What mayor?"

"Mayor Carole Lombard."

It turned out that Birdwell had bamboozled the city fathers into appointing Carole mayor for the day. Her only official act was proclaiming the holiday. She explained to the producer, "Everybody on the lot looked so tired I thought an extra day's rest would do them good."

Mr. Selznick replied that he would appreciate it if she would restrict her humane impulses to acts that did not cost him thousands of dollars. He endured Birdwell's participation because the press agent was one of the greatest space grabbers since Phineas T. Barnum. One of Bird's stunts made Carole the world's most popular big money earner for a time.

The New York *Herald Tribune* told the story under this headline:

CAROLE LOMBARD IS GLAD
U.S. TAKES MOST OF PAY

One day early in August, 1914, a director not noted for his competence dropped into Carole's dressing-room while she was chatting with Birdwell. The director wailed for five solid minutes about his horrendous income tax. Carole, for once speechless, listened. When the

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director walked out, she started screaming and beating the wall in a rage.

"That guy!" she cried. "Overpaid, underworked and with the brain of a flea. Complaining! He ought to be glad he has eating money! I'm proud to pay my income tax."

As a reporter, Birdwell had observed how fed up people with small incomes were with the complaints of the rich about having to pay high income taxes, particularly those coming from Hollywood's millionaires.

He telephoned the wire services from Carole's dressing-room. She told the reporters that she had earned \$465,000 in 1937; \$450,000 for three movies, \$15,000 for three radio appearances. Of this, she had paid about 85 per cent, or \$395,575 for Federal and State income taxes. After paying the salaries of her agent and her business manager, and \$10,000 for publicity and other expenses, she had \$20,000 left for herself.

"The Government," Carole declared, "spent most of the rest of my year's earnings on general improvements for the country, and I really think I got my money's worth." Within hours the news that Carole Lombard enjoyed paying income taxes was girdling the globe.

Some of the finest creative minds in Hollywood had a hand in the making of *Gone With the Wind*. But the man responsible for its fabulous success was David O. Selznick, its producer. His life had been almost as unusual as Gable's.

When David and his older brother, Myron, were of college age their father, a pioneer film producer, gave them each \$1,000 a week for spending money. When the boys were in their early twenties that dropped to nothing a week. This was because their father, Lewis J. Selznick, was bankrupted and driven out of the picture business by competitors, headed by Louis B. Mayer. Mr. Selznick did not long survive this disaster. He had been adored by his two sons and they swore to revenge themselves on Mayer and the other wolfish characters who had destroyed him.

At the moment, they were so loaded down with debt that their plan seemed ridiculous. In order to support themselves and their mother they had to borrow money from Marjorie Daw, Myron's sweetheart whom he later married. Marjorie, a bewitching girl with a saucy face, had been Douglas Fairbanks's leading lady in several pictures.

At twenty-one, David demonstrated his flair for showmanship by capitalizing on the public interest in Louis Angel Firpo, the Argentine

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heavyweight who was about to fight Jack Dempsey for the World Heavyweight Championship, David borrowed \$1,000 and offered it to Firpo for a single day's work before the camera. Firpo, the so-called Wild Bull of the Pampas, accepted on being told that he would be required only to go through his regular training routine: run, jump rope, do callisthenics, pummel the big bag, the little bag, and his sparring partners.

Master David on lining up the shooting schedule discovered that making the short feature would take from 16 to 18 hours. It was no secret that Mr. Firpo's ferocity in the ring was as nothing compared to his ferocity in getting every dollar he was entitled to. So David wasted no time asking him to work for an extra half-day. He woke up the scowling scrapper at dawn, kept him going unceasingly until midnight, and all that remained then was to process and rush his little film out to the theatres before the fight. David made a tidy sum out of his enterprise. However, due to the violent opposition of Mr. Mayer, it took him years to get a decent foothold in Hollywood.

His brother Myron decided to become a Hollywood agent. This, he thought, would give him a chance to bankrupt his father's foes by charging them ruinous fees for the services of actors, writers, directors, and for stories they wanted. As partner of Frank Joyce, brother of the silent film star Alice Joyce, he had soon acquired the necessary clients and story properties, and was forcing the tycoons at the studios to pay astronomical prices.

Ben Hecht wrote in his autobiography:

To Myron, the writer was an important weapon in his war on the movies. . . . His work of vengeance changed the Hollywood climate. It doubled, tripled and quadrupled the salaries of writers, actors, and directors—myself among them. Myron making a deal with a studio head was a scene out of Robin Hood. He was not only dedicated to his task of bankrupting the studio, but ready to back up his sales talk with fisticuffs, if the discussion was not to his liking. . . .

Needless to say, Myron's plan aroused an enthusiasm never observed before among the world's creative artists. They came to Hollywood in a steady stream—English novelists, French playwrights, Spanish dancers, Italian directors, Australian scenic designers.

Never anywhere, not even in Florence during the Renaissance, was so much talent available in one place. Never was it paid so bountifully. But Myron's scheme backfired. The prices he (and other agents

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who followed his example) extorted for stories and the services of their clients only enabled Mayer and the others he was gunning for to claim they had to get more money too. Thanks partly to Myron's campaign, Louis B. Mayer, in 1914, earned \$1,300,000 and became the highest paid salaried man in the history of labour and management.

From the beginning David had figured out a much more direct and interesting way to humiliate his father's foes. He intended to put the name of Selznick back on top again by making better movies than any of them could.

In a very few years he succeeded.

From the start Mayer tried to keep him out of the business. Yet when Selznick's pictures kept on being praised by the critics and loved by the public, Louis B. acquiesced to his being hired by M-G-M. But when his own daughter, Irene, announced she and David planned to marry, Louis B. said he was a schnook and "a bum just like his old man was".

David replied by making such classy and profitable films as *Dinner at Eight*, *David Copperfield*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*.

But in 1935, David left M-G-M to form his own company. It was capitalized for \$3,200,000. He had most distinguished backers, headed by John Hay (Jock) Whitney. The group included three other Whitneys, two Lehmans, Yellow Taxicab King John Hertz, Irving Thalberg and Norma Shearer.

Irving Thalberg died the following year, and Mr. Mayer, who some time before had stopped calling his son-in-law a schnook, tried to get David to take Thalberg's place. David refused.

Ironically, the smartest move of David's career, purchasing film rights before publication to *Gone With the Wind*, was to make Louis B. Mayer a more powerful figure than ever.

One circumstance alone put him in the driver's seat: David Selznick had his heart set on having Clark Gable play Rhett Butler, and Mr. Mayer's company still had that handsome and valuable property under long-term contract. Acting like a very unloving father-in-law indeed, Louis B. refused to lend Clark to Selznick unless the picture was distributed through Loew's, Inc., which owned M-G-M and distributed its product.

David protested, "I've just signed a three-year contract with United Artists to distribute my pictures. It will mean waiting more than two years before I can even make it."

"Yes, I know," said his father-in-law.

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The deal M-G-M forced on David O. Selznick was a tough one. For the loan of Gable and putting up half of the estimated \$2,500,000 cost, M-G-M obtained half-ownership of *Gone With the Wind* for seven years, 25 per cent of it thereafter. In addition Loew's, Inc., was to get 15 per cent of the gross receipts for distributing the picture. It was to turn out to be the most profitable deal in the company's history.

That Selznick should have accepted these piratical terms—which also meant delaying for three years making his masterpiece—to get Clark was the greatest compliment any performer ever received.

Selznick estimates that Gable's services for that picture cost him \$25,000,000. And the figure will go higher with each revival of the classic and the eventual sale of television rights.

While waiting to start *Gone With the Wind* David kept making first-rate pictures. This alone would not have impressed Hollywood. "Any dope can produce a masterpiece," the old saying there goes; "the real trick is to produce masterpieces that make money."

Like Thalberg, David knew this trick. A good example was *A Star Is Born* which won all sorts of Academy Awards and also made a fortune. Like Gable, David had instinctive good taste. He was a born storyteller with a fine plot sense, had a good sense of humour and was perceptive, a brilliant talker. Having grown up in the business, he understood every phase of production. He thought he knew more about every department in his studio than the head of it. If he couldn't write as well as Ben Hecht, he could plot stories almost as well. If he could not design scenes as did his art director, William Cameron Menzies, his taste in furnishings and backgrounds was superb, his knowledge surprisingly broad. And in the all-important work of editing a film he, again like Thalberg, had few equals.

One fault of his was wanting to involve himself completely in each and every thing that was going on. He found it difficult to delegate authority because he was so eager to have everything just right. If a phone rang in his office he would leap toward it. If some obscure newspaperman wanted to interview him, he would postpone important conferences to make sure the reporter would not misquote him in the *Podunk Gazette* or the *Walla Walla Advertiser*.

Old-timers who lamented the passing of the insane atmosphere that had made film-making in the silent days such fun, could drop into David's place of business and feel young, joyous, and sound in the funny bone again.

David, a big, shaggy, kindhearted, life-loving man, had the head

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of a Roman Emperor. Day and night he was all over the works, supervising the writing and directing, cutting scenes, ordering stories bought, having actors brought in from New York, Paris and Constantinople, approving or disapproving costumes. It was his pleasure to write memos longer than the Gettysburg Address, the American Bill of Rights and the Communist Manifesto combined. The people who worked for him liked and admired him, even when inconvenienced by his eccentricities.

To protect David from his own generous impulses, Daniel T. O'Shea, one of the sharpest lawyers in California, had been hired to make all deals for him. As a result as brilliant a young writer as Budd Schulberg, then twenty-one, would be working for him for months for \$50 a week, a stipend that would have astonished Selznick if he'd been aware of it.

David's partners also brought in, as vice-president, Henry Ginsberg, who devoted himself to lopping people off the payroll. These dismissed employees needed only to mention to David that they'd been fired and they were re-employed on the spot.

It was rumoured around the studio that, brilliant as he was, David had never learned to tell time, or night from day. His staff of technicians and department heads were not afraid to argue with him, but they never knew when the boss would come to the studio. If nothing important was shooting that day he might arrive as late as four-thirty or five-thirty in the afternoon, just as they were about to go home. Arriving fresh and bright-eyed, he was glad to argue with any of them, and invariably won over his fatigued lieutenants. He found it easy to win over those married to women who could not believe it necessary for their husbands to stay at the studio until four, five or six in the morning.

David was so nearsighted that it was hard to understand how he was able to see so much of what was going on at the studio. One night he and Myron got into a drunken fist fight with their friends, Ben Hecht and Charlie MacArthur. The battle ended quickly when David, having taken off his thick-lensed glasses, attacked Myron whom he mistook for one of the playwrights.

That \$1,000-a-week allowance his papa had given him also made him practically indifferent to the cost of things. It was his custom to keep fifteen or twenty cooks, waitresses and other help standing by for hours in his commissary just in case he felt like having a ham sandwich at two in the morning.

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David, though a combined work horse and whirling dervish, sometimes relaxed at the roulette table of the Clover Club, Hollywood's favourite gambling spot. Once he absent-mindedly lost \$50,000. Not at all concerned, he wrote out a cheque, but the manager said he'd just had a disillusioning experience with another film producer. "He wrote out a cheque that big and then cancelled payment."

The gambler explained that unless Selznick could produce the cash he would have to wait there until the banks opened up in the morning. David called his wife, who, in turn, called her father, Louis B. The legend is that Mayer raised the money by waking up the managers of all the theatres in the Los Angeles area who rented M-G-M pictures. He told them to bring the night's receipts to the Clover Club. Meanwhile David, growing restless while waiting, had lost \$11,500 more. On getting the \$50,000 in cash, the club graciously accepted Mr. Selznick's personal cheque for this smaller amount.

Gone With the Wind cost \$3,750,000, 50 per cent more than its original budget, and took almost six months to shoot. Thirteen writers worked on the screen play, and four directors.

The book sale, and it was one of the great best sellers of all time, helped sustain the public's interest in the film version. Another factor was the hoopla Russell Birdwell made over Selznick's world-wide search for an actress to play Scarlett O'Hara. This seemed to keep the fans goggle-eyed with suspense. Scores of great actresses were tested. The many polls taken revealed that Bette Davis was the popular choice, with Margaret Sullivan second. But Selznick wanted an unknown girl. Among the youngsters just then coming up who were considered were Pauline Goddard, Joan Fontaine, Lana Turner and Susan Hayward. Lucille Ball, also just starting, was asked to take a test but refused, saying, "Mc play Scarlett O'Hara? Are you kidding?"

In the end Selznick picked, instead of an unknown, Vivien Leigh, who had starred with her future husband, Laurence Olivier, in many British pictures but was not too well known in America.

There were also polls on "Who shall play Rhett Butler?" but the choice of Gable was unanimous. The public apparently could not see anyone else in the part of the dashing, lady-killing, Civil War profiteer.

Gable said he was reluctant to play it for two reasons. He felt that the six million persons who had read the book would have a set opinion of how Rhett Butler should be played. "It meant," he told Whitney Bolton, "having every one of them looking me in the eye and saying 'You better be good, boy.'"

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He also objected to the director, George Cukor. Cukor was a woman's director and Gable was afraid that Cukor would throw the big scenes to the actress playing Scarlett, which would submerge his role.

Selznick assured Clark that if he thought his role had become secondary after the film was shot, everything possible would be done to remedy that.

After shooting for a week, Cukor was taken off the picture and replaced by Victor Fleming, Clark's favourite director. Ben Hecht was called in to rewrite the script. The already staggering cost of the picture kept mounting as the stars, large supporting cast and working crew, all on weekly salary, sat down and waited for work to be resumed.

Fleming was not over enthusiastic about the assignment, and when Selznick offered him a percentage of the profits in exchange for waiving part of his salary, he laughed.

"Do you think I'm a damn fool, David?" he demanded. "This picture is going to be the biggest white elephant of all time."

Clark, once he accepted the assignment, went at it in his usual workmanlike fashion. He was always on time and always knew his lines. One thing that did annoy him, however, was David's distressing habit of sending out messengers to his house on motorcycles at two or three in the morning to hand him last-minute changes in the next day's scenes.

And there was one scene he did not want to play as it was written. This was the scene in which, on hearing of Scarlett's miscarriage, he breaks down and weeps, as Melanie enters the room.

"Clark was violently opposed to this," Selznick says. "In his opinion there was nothing more contemptible than self-pity. He could not see himself weeping over this situation."

Selznick argued that self-pity was the most universal of all emotions, something everyone feels at some time or other. The public would feel an identity here with him as Rhett Butler because he, too, was vulnerable. In the end, the scene was shot both ways. After seeing the two versions, Clark agreed that the producer had been right, and when he saw the completed film he acknowledged that nothing in it needed to be changed.

The two stars of *Gone With the Wind* got along well until the picture was finished. But one morning they were called to M-G-M to make advertising stills. The call was for eleven in the morning. Clark was on time but not Vivien Leigh.

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"Where's the star?" Gable asked Larry Barbier, who was in charge.

Barbier said he would find out. He had followed the usual procedure of sending written notes to both stars the day before asking them to be on hand, costumed and made up, by 11 a.m. sharp.

The gate policeman said that Miss Leigh had not yet arrived. This would mean considerable delay while she was being dressed and made up.

"I did not know what to do," Barbier says. "Clark was a man who could overlook almost anything but having you lie to him. But I knew that if I told him the truth he wouldn't wait, so I took a chance. I didn't want to lose him as long as I had him there.

" 'She's being made up right now,' I said, hoping that Leigh would arrive in the next few moments and be almost ready before Clark started to get restless again.

"And he was pretty patient. He waited for another half-hour then came storming out of his dressing-room. 'What the hell is this?' he demanded. 'You told me she was in make-up. If she was, she would be here by now, wouldn't she?' "

"Yes," Barbier said, and explained that he had lied, and why.

Gable thought that over, then asked, "Did you put the call through for her yesterday?"

Larry said he had.

"In writing?"

"Yes."

"Time and Gable wait for no actress," he told Larry, and left. That was shortly after twelve.

Vivien Leigh arrived at one o'clock.

A few days later another appointment was made for taking the advertising stills. This time both stars were on time and were apparently once more on excellent terms with each other.

Gone With the Wind had its world première at Atlanta, where Gable was acclaimed as though he had won a second Civil War for the South. The *Atlanta Constitution*, in fact, called the première "the biggest news event since Sherman".

When it was over, everybody raved about the picture and Gable's superb performance. Everybody but Clark. Again he was like a school-boy boasting about his sweetheart. When they got home he told everybody in the studio, "Oh, the hell with the picture and the première. You should see the way those Southern belles looked at Carole. You never saw anybody so beautiful in your life."

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David Selznick says he has never regretted paying \$25,000,000 for the privilege of having him in the film. "He was worth every penny of it," he insists. "I don't know of any actor, except possibly John Barrymore, who could have played Rhett Butler as well as he did.

"Clark made you believe whatever he was playing. He had that God-given thing: a theatrical personality, the ability to communicate with the audience, which all the training in the world cannot give you. It is only aided and abetted by experience. Without this quality there is no such thing as the star personality. It is not just being photogenic. It is an indefinable something which I like to think I can spot immediately in a person. The public caught it in Clark Gable the first time he walked on the screen."

If you talk to any of the people at M-G-M about Gable they will tell you that the fans, as enraptured as they were to see their idol in person, never put their hands on him. This was true only in the last years of his life.

He was badly mauled in December, 1914, in New York. He was there to see the play *Idiot's Delight*, and to talk to Alfred Lunt, who was playing the part which Gable was about to do in M-G-M's film version.

A woman saw Clark in a cab one afternoon in Madison Avenue and Fiftieth Street. As it stopped for a red light, she shrieked, "*Clark Gable*", and rushed over. Her excitement infected everybody on the street. In no time traffic on that busy boulevard was stopped and a hysterical mob of women was trying to open the cab doors and drag him out. The traffic cop on that corner was swept off his feet. Gable managed to lock the doors just in time. He sat there, smiling and bowing, until a police emergency squad could clear enough women out of the way to rescue him.

On that trip, as a matter of fact, he was surrounded by shrieking women every time they sighted him. These New York admirers made him so uncomfortable that he cut his trip from ten days to three.

"It has always fascinated me," says one film director who worked often with Clark, "that the business of pushing him around like other stars stopped when he got older. Why was it? You know we kid a lot about that title of King, but he did have the bearing of a regal personage at that.

"Remember, everybody in the world knew him by that time. They'd seen him eat, fight, make love, smile, howl with pain, go to bed, get up. He was so big, so strong. There were those ears and jaunty

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walk. If Gable got off a plane in Africa, or went fishing in a remote region of Mexico, or walked down a street in China, he was recognized, followed, stared at. But in his last years, people never came too close to him, or touched him. Why?"

There was another thing about Gable's physical presence that indicates he had some effect on people when he approached them, and this began before he was famous, almost from the time he started working in pictures.

Ralph Wheelwright, a M-G-M publicity man who is not at all impressed by most stars, says, "The first time I saw Gable he was in one of the early pictures he did with Joan Crawford. He appeared in the doorway of the sound stage while they were making a scene away down at the opposite end of that barnlike place. Yet everybody working there felt something, and looked around. All of his life people turned around to look at Clark Gable."

Eleanor Harris, the magazine writer, had the same experience fifteen years later. She was at a cocktail party at the Evelyn MacLean mansion in Washington. Quite a few celebrities were present. "Suddenly, I had that curious compulsion to turn around, so did everyone in the room. Gable had arrived and was standing between two opened French windows for a moment, before coming in."

Terry Hunt, who runs a health club patronized by half the stars in Hollywood, recalls that Gable was the only one of them who could create traffic problems, turn the young girls' knees to jelly and make the old babes' eyes go glassy.

"This is Hollywood, remember," said the health club owner, "where people see great movie stars all the time. Yet what went on here each time Gable visited us was almost unbelievable. Women driving past would lose control of their cars. One spun hers around as though it was on a turntable on seeing him.

"Women waiting to make arrangements with me for a course would giggle and shriek and moan on seeing him go in. It was as though you plugged them all in on the same electric socket. One shrieked, 'Clark Gable! I just don't believe it', and fainted dead away. More than once I caught some of my older women customers sticking their heads into the door of the men's gym just to get another look at him. Even my secretary, Mary Roberts, who has been with me for many years, got the jumps and goose pimples each time she saw that big guy.

"One day word got around Jim Otto's restaurant down on the

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corner that Gable was in the club. It was the noon lunch hour, but soon half the waitresses had deserted their posts. They stood around my entrance for an hour, waiting to see Gable come out."

"Unlike some of my other celebrated customers," says Terry, "I never heard Clark gripe about anything. A health club and gymnasium is a good place to let off steam about terrible scripts, unfair reviews, stupidity in the front office, all of that stuff. You even have a captive audience. But there was never even a mild beef out of Gable.

"I've heard people say he drank quite a bit. But if he was ever drinking or suffering from a hangover when he came to my place, I never knew it.

"Clark had a physique that compared favourably with that of Johnny Weismuller and other athletes who worked out here. What was unusual for a man with so muscular a figure was that Clark always looked so good in any sort of clothes.

"While Gable was one of my customers I started a mail order course in physical training. He was one of the stars whom I asked for a signed endorsement. He gave it, but M-G-M ordered me to stop using his name for commercial purposes. They said that, according to their contract with him, his name could not be used without their consent. I told Clark that, and he said, 'The hell with them. Keep using it, Terry!' That's the sort of man he was."

All of this adulation, together with the big money, was enough to turn anybody's head. But what Clark promised himself on the night in 1935 when he won the Academy Award—"It's not gonna change the size of my hat"—still went. He took it all in his stride, this man who had been laughed at as a hopeless lummoX in his youth, gone hungry and failed to make it even as an extra. One thing he did do about this time was to stop talking about going to Heidelberg to study medicine, or of retiring in five years. He still believed the world overestimated him, but it was now beginning to look as though film-goers might continue paying to see him for quite a while.

He was not one of the Hollywood stars who kept talking about the great old days on Broadway and how he longed to get back there. One day Robert Montgomery, his fellow star, grouched to him about how fed up he was with living and working in Hollywood and said he wished he was back on Broadway.

"Bob," said Gable, "is eleven tomorrow morning too late for me to drive you down to the railway station?"

"What in hell are you talking about?" said Montgomery.

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"You and I were \$150-a-week juveniles on Broadway at the same time, Bob," Clark reminded him; "that's when we were lucky enough to be working. It did not happen often. We came out here about the same time, had the same kind of success out here, made the same kind of money. If you haven't a million dollars of Hollywood's money right now you are a bigger fool than I think you are. Personally, I feel I'm a very lucky chicken. But that's only my personal opinion. I owe M-G-M everything I have. You say you want to go back to Broadway. That's why I asked you to let me drive you. I figured that must be the only reason you don't go back; because you don't know where the railway station is."

He never took seriously being called "The King". That had all started as a sort of joke. To Clark it remained a joke. One morning Spencer Tracy drove up to the studio and was unable to get in. The whole entrance was blocked by autograph-seekers who had surrounded Gable's car. Nobody seemed to notice Tracy. He stood up, bowed to Gable, and shouted, "Long live the King! And now, for Christ's sake, let's get inside and go to work."

A few days later somebody got a brass crown out of the Props Department and had it covered with white rabbit fur. Tracy put it on Gable's head while pictures were made of the ceremony, which took place in the commissary. The crown didn't fit him, and he looked ridiculous in it. The prints were destroyed.

Ed Sullivan was doing his column in Hollywood then. He heard of the stunt and got the idea of polling his editors. They voted Gable King and Myrna Loy Queen of the Movies. The two were crowned by the columnist in a second coronation ceremony.

Tracy and Gable liked and admired each other, but were not friends outside the studio. Each of them would have liked to be what the other was. Tracy would have liked to be the most popular idol, Gable the great character actor Spence was.

"That old sonofabitch knows all of the tricks," Clark once told his pal, Al Menasco, "but I know how to keep up with him."

He did it with sheer personality, character, power of projection. Some of the pictures those two made together were great: *Boomtown*, *San Francisco*, *Test Pilot*. In their scenes together, both tried to steal the spotlight from one another. Both took the same fierce pride in knowing their lines. Working together they set a new low record for retakes required of their scenes.

There were many fights called for by the scripts of their pictures.

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In one, Clark let go with a wallop that landed much harder than he intended. Tracy claimed he needed medical attention.

After apologizing, Gable went back to his dressing-room. Larry Barbier came in a few minutes later. Gable asked him, "Did I really hurt him?"

"No!"

One difference between the two stars was in their temperaments. Gable was incapable of bawling out an electrician or some other set worker whose mistake spoiled a scene. But Tracy, the Irishman with the stormy heart, could fly off at the least provocation.

Gable understood this and attributed it to Tracy's family troubles which were enough to drive anyone frantic. One thing did enrage Clark. This was the fact that Tracy's religious beliefs as a Catholic prevented him from seeking a divorce to marry a famous actress whom he loved and who loved him. "No religion," Gable sometimes told friends, "should be able to hold a man in such bondage."

Gable's compassionate feeling for Spencer Tracy increased after he himself found happiness with Carole. He had bought the home he was to live in for the rest of his life at Encino.

He had bought the house before they were married. Carole had decorated it, but it was still a man's house. Even the highball glasses were man's size, huge. Visitors said, "This is one place I can get drunk on just one drink." And Carole, who loved beer but rarely drank anything stronger, gave them the shock treatment when she made a sky-high highball: nine-tenths whisky and just enough ice and soda to show they were civilized.

The house was small, two stories, with a gabled roof. He laughed when he recalled the argument they'd had about the dining-room. She'd noticed that when they had dinner guests some of them had to sit so close to the fireplace, they were uncomfortable, and one night, at dinner, she suggested they enlarge the room. Clark threw down his napkin and stamped upstairs. He didn't speak to her for three nights. He'd eat his meals in silence, then go upstairs.

Carole pretended not to notice this until the third night. Then she said, "Listen here, you sonofabitch, I want you to hear me out. What in hell is wrong with you? Why do you go off your rocker when I merely mention that I'd like having something changed?"

"I can't stand carpenters, that's why."

"What do you mean by *that*!"

"They are the only workmen who don't clean up when they are

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through on a job. Painters clean up, plasterers clean up—but not carpenters. I won't have them in the house. I don't want to be here and see the mess they make."

Carole did not argue. She waited until he had a picture that sent him out on location—and that didn't happen for six months. He was to be away three weeks, and while he was gone she had the dining-room enlarged.

When he came back he looked around the room. All he said was, "All right, Carole. It looks fine." But Carole, in telling friends about it, said, "The day before he came home I went to town and bought a magnifying-glass. You're crazy if you don't think I got down on my hands and knees and went over every inch of the place with that thing in my hand."

They gave very few dinner parties. Once they invited Janet Gaynor, who had been an extra with Clark, and her husband, Adrian, the dress designer. Clark and Carole tried to shock them.

"Pass me the — potatoes," Carole said.

"What about that — salad, looks like sheep dip, doesn't it?" Clark replied.

Janet told Russell Birdwell later, "You know, I'm not prudish. But it was strange, so childish."

Far stranger was Gable's compulsive finickiness about cleanliness and neatness, particularly because it was in such contrast to his love of saying and hearing four-letter words. He did not quite understand it himself. But it was extreme, and possibly due to the fact that the filth in which he'd seen loggers and oil boomers live had so disgusted him that he never got over it.

There were two bedroom units upstairs. Carole's was the only feminine-looking part of the house. In Clark's closet hung scores of impeccable-looking slacks which Clark had arranged by colour, shade by shade, from the lightest grey, through blue and tan and brown to charcoal to black.

One night he insisted on going on a duck-hunting trip, despite a bad cold. He came back at three in the afternoon, in a pouring rain-storm. Carole, hearing him drive in, waited with a drink in her hand. After a few minutes she went out into the garage to find him cleaning the mud off his boots.

"You are soaking wet," she yelled, "come in the house."

"Can't, honey," he said as he took the drink. "I must dry and clean these boots."

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"Let Martin do it. That's what we pay him for."

Gable shook his head. He went on, cleaning and soaping and polishing them until they were gleaming.

The happiest day of that marriage for Clark began at three o'clock one morning when he was unable to sleep. Carole heard him stirring around.

"What's wrong, darling?" she asked.

"Can't sleep," he replied. "I'd like to go hunting."

"Why don't you?"

"Oh, it's too much trouble. By the time I get everything packed and ready it will be too late."

"No, it won't," she told him. "Everything's all ready now."

She led him out to the garage. In a dark, obscure corner she had a trailer stocked with everything a hunting man could want, including whisky, and a little icebox stocked with cold beer.

"I'm going with you this time, and every time if you'll have me."

"I'll have you!" he said delightedly.

In a few minutes, they were off. And he never went hunting or fishing after that without her. Gable belonged to a hunting club at Bakersfield from which women were barred, but they made an exception of Carole.

"She insisted on wading out in icy water to put out the decoys," says O. O. Dull, president of the club. "She told me, 'If I am going duck hunting with men, I want to do everything they do.'"

"Not many women would have cared to join us. There was no hot water. You washed in a basin of cold water. Carole slept in the trailer. At three o'clock in the morning Clark would wake her up by banging on the side of it."

On other hunting trips Carole and Clark would disappear for days. Once they were reported missing in Mexico. Searching parties, cars, planes were sent out by the Mexican Government to look for them. They were soon found, safe and sound. It turned out to be a publicity stunt dreamed up by Otto Winkler, who'd been assigned by M-G-M at Clark's request to handle all Gable publicity. They'd met at the paternity trial. After the trial Winkler, a police reporter, had taken Gable out often with him in a Los Angeles police department prowler car. In time Clark became so fond of Winkler that he got him a better-paying job at the studio.

Mexican officials were highly indignant at the trouble the fake yarn caused them. They complained to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, which

THE BIG MAN GROWS BIGGER

promised to fire the misguided Winkler, but Gable stepped in and stopped them.

Other Hollywood wives envied Carole.

One evening she and Clark went to the home of Alfred Hitchcock for dinner. After dinner Carole and Mrs. Hitchcock went upstairs.

"Oh, Carole," said the director's wife, "I wish you would tell me your secret. As you know, Hitchy and I have been married for more than a dozen years. We get along splendidly most of the time, and he is a darling, but we have been quarrelling lately and about the smallest things. I just cannot understand it."

Young Mrs. Gable gave her a puzzled glance, then told this story.

"After Clark and I met at the White Mayfair Ball, he gave me a shrunken Indian head that he had bought in South America. But we quarrelled constantly. It worried both of us.

"One night when we were going to a party I had an impulse and put the little head in my pocket. On the way I asked Clark to stop the car. He wanted to know why. I took out the Indian head, twirled it three times around my head and threw it out into the canyon. I told him, 'That is the little stinker who has been putting the whammy on us and causing all the trouble. I'm glad we're rid of him at last.'

"Well, you know how men are, Mrs. Hitchcock. He was very amused at the time. But before the party was half over he started worrying about the shrunken head lying down there in the bottom of the canyon. He said, 'You know someone might find that damned thing and bring it to the cops. Our finger-prints are all over it and they might start questioning us about it. We'll seem ridiculous.'

"On our way back we got out of the car with a flashlight and climbed down into the canyon and started looking for the head. After a while a police prowler came along. The cops saw the light moving down far below and went down after us with drawn guns.

"'What are you people doing down here?' one asked.

"Then they recognized us, of course, and we're very nice. They asked if they could be of some help. Clark said they sure could and told them the story. They both helped in the search. After twenty minutes or so one of the cops found the shrunken head and handed it to Clark.

"The next day we put the damn thing in a little box. We wanted to bury it, but not on our property, or anywhere near it. We came a long way to bury it, to this very neighbourhood, in fact. We chose the yard of a house we could see was unoccupied."

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She went to the window and looked out. "How long ago did you rent this house?" she asked the director's wife.

"Oh, five months ago, I'd say."

Carole looked worried as she turned again and looked out of the window. "And did your quarrelling with Hitchy only start when you moved here?"

The other woman nodded. Carole clapped her hand to her head. "Oh, no," she shrieked, "it can't be! But it is!"

"What's wrong, my dear?"

"Clark and I have put the whammy on you, that's what's wrong! It was in the yard of this place that we buried the little shrunken head."

People who had known how much Carole had valued her freedom, and how headstrong she could be, marvelled at her ability to adjust her whole life to Clark's.

But she had not been conquered by what they suspected. It was not his overwhelming sex potency. Quite the contrary was true. Carole, as frank in her discussion of events in the boudoir as everything else, told one physician friend of Gable's, "He has been sex-starved for years." To certain of her own friends she complained, "My God, you know how I love Paw, but I can't say he is a hell of a good lay."

What she told him, if anything, about this is a secret that died with them.

He had other values for her. He was all of a piece as a person. There was his integrity. Whatever he did, whatever he said, you could live with. You knew what he was, where he stood and that he wouldn't change. This was not lack of intelligence to her. She had been brought up to believe that was character.

Her admiration for him as a performer was unbounded. Here too was integrity. Her big man *was* Fletcher Christian of the British Royal Navy, or the hard-rolling tough guy in *San Francisco*, or Rhett Butler, gallant, sassy, proud, taking advantage of the South's agony and being unafraid to admit it. He was all man on the screen, inspiring people with love, holding the mirror up for them to courage and adventure and honest, hard-hitting punching. He was the husband, the father, the lover they wanted, but never had. He also gave them hope, the hope of finding for themselves another like him, smiling always with health and strength and self-confidence. His perspicacity about his trade, by the way, once surprised Ben Hecht, who wrote the screen play for Gable's 1940 hit, *Comrade X*. After reading the script Gable

came and asked Ben to eliminate him from one scene. In it Hedy Lamarr, playing a Russian, denounced him for several minutes to another character.

"Don't you like standing there while Hedy makes fun of you?" the writer asked.

"It's not that," Gable said. "But you'll do better if you get me out of the scene. The people will be looking at me, and won't laugh."

Hecht took it up with the director and producer but they rejected Clark's suggestion, and shot the long scene with him in it. When *Conquering X* was previewed the scene, which was supposed to be very funny, got nothing even resembling a laugh. It flopped so badly that M-G-M decided to reshoot it exactly as Gable suggested in the first place, something that cost the studio about \$350,000.

The incident illustrates Gable's attitude about letting "writers write his movies and directors direct". If he thought something would be more effective done another way, he would mention it. If he was overruled, he did it their way. Actually, it was a wise policy. He found that they turned out to be right more often than wrong.

The happy days and nights of Carole and Clark began to form a long chain

A clown with a bomb in his pocket meanwhile had been rocking Europe. He jabbered messages of hate and destruction, gesticulated, held up his hand, made threatening gestures. To most Americans he looked like a character who had fallen out of a comic strip. He started killing Jews. Nothing happened. He started building a big army, a navy, an air force. Nobody tried to stop him, or the millions who followed him. He began to take over great pieces of territory, then whole countries. He defied the world to stop him. To most of Europe it seemed already too late. Some Americans thought that Adolf Hitler would settle down after a while and make it possible to live with him, trade with him.

Carole was not one of them. She was already in a rage over Hitler when the humiliation and shock of Pearl Harbour came. The next day, she wrote to her friend. President Roosevelt, offering Clark's services and her own. He was to make any use of them he wished.

A week later a letter came from the White House telling them to continue what they were doing: entertaining. She had just finished a picture with Jack Benny, but Clark had a new one to do with Lana Turner. He was in the middle of this picture when Washington asked Carole to go on a bond-selling tour.

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Carole took her mother along. Clark got Otto Winkler, the publicity man M-G-M had assigned to him, to take his place on the trip with the two women.

"You know how hard Carole goes at everything," he said. "She'll kill herself if she gets the chance. There will be reporters swarming all over her, people tugging at her, luggage to take care of."

Winkler agreed to go.

The day after they left, Al Menasco, one of Clark's closest friends, called up Gable. "Hey, Clark," he said, "where is Carole now?"

Gable looked at his watch. "Right this minute," he said, "she should be making a speech at Salt Lake City from the back of her train."

Days later from Amarillo, Texas, Carole wired him.

HEY, PAPPY, YOU BETTER GET IN THIS MAN'S ARMY

It was the last message he ever had from her.

II

The Long Nightmare Begins

CAROLE'S tour aroused plenty of enthusiasm for the Defence Bond Drive wherever she appeared. But the frosty day in mid-January when she officially opened the campaign in Indiana, her native state, she was at her very best. Nobody ever looked more like a gorgeous Hollywood queen than did Carole that day in her best furs and glittering with jewellery. But she also managed to be as folksy as the woman in charge of the blueberry pie exhibits at the State Fair, kissing and shaking hands with old family friends from Fort Wayne. At the end of several hours of hard work in the lobby of the Statehouse in Indianapolis she had sold more than \$2,000,000 worth of Defence Bonds and Stamps.

That was supposed to wind up her tour. But that night she was talked into attending a rally at Cadle Tabernacle where, bejewelled, dressed in a strapless black evening gown and long black gloves, she led the singing of "The Star-Spangled Banner".

When that was over, Carole suggested that they change their plans and go home by plane. "I just can't wait to see Paw," she said. Her mother protested. Mrs. Peters had always been frightened of flying.

Winkler also thought they should go by train. "This has been an exhausting trip for all of us," he said. "Let's go to an hotel, get a few hours' sleep, and take a train tomorrow. That will be more restful than a plane."

"I won't have any trouble sleeping in a plane," Carole said. "Not the way I feel. But let's toss for it. Tails we go by plane, heads by train."

Winkler got out a quarter, and tossed. It came down tails.

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They got on the TWA Flight 3 Transport plane which left Indianapolis at 4 a.m. It originated in New York and still had a good many more stops to make. Along the way Otto Winkler wired Clark to meet them at Los Angeles Airport around eight o'clock that evening. The last stop before that was Las Vegas, from which they took off at about 7 p.m. By that time the plane was full of Ferry Command pilots. A dozen of them had got on at Albuquerque, causing four civilians, including an indignant concert violinist, to be put off.

Gable was still at home when the plane left Las Vegas. With his houseman, Rufus Martin, and Jean Garceau, the secretary he shared with Carole, he was finishing preparations for the little welcome home dinner he'd planned. Except when one of them was away on location, he could not recall when they'd been separated for even one night. The last time, he thought, must have been before she started going on his hunting and camping trips.

During the afternoon he got Larry Barbier and some of his other friends at the studio to cook up a gag to pull on Carole. He wanted one that would knock her off her feet, and the gang co-operated.

They got a wax dummy of a blonde woman and put it into Carole's bed. "Wish we could be there to see the show she'll put on," the boys told Clark.

Just as he was about to leave for the airport the phone rang. It was the studio calling to say that a report was on the radio that Carole's plane was down.

"What happened?" Clark shouted. "What about Maw?" There were no other details as yet, he was told. Even more alarming was what the studio man said next: the studio was trying to charter a plane for him.

Gable called Fieldsie.

"I'm afraid something's happened to Maw," he said. "Her plane is down."

Fieldsie was unworried at first. She reminded him that things had happened before to planes on which Carole was a passenger but somehow she never had been injured. One of those planes, in fact, had caught fire while in the air.

"Eddie Mannix and Ralph Wheelwright are coming to take me to the airport. Don't you suppose they must have heard something that they didn't tell me?"

"I'll be right over," Fieldsie said quietly. She didn't like the sound of that herself. She decided to wait at the Gables' house until Carole came home.

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By the time Wheelwright and Mannix picked him up, other friends, including Howard Strickling and Al Menasco, had phoned. Strickling and Menasco said they'd meet him at the airport and go with him to Las Vegas.

It was in the car on the way to the airport that Clark first suspected the truth. There were still only fragments of information coming over the radio—but every scrap of it was ominous. No word at all from the plane—no trace of its having been seen in the air since workers at the Blue Diamond Mine reported a flaring light in the sky, then hearing an explosion. They thought it had happened about thirty miles southwest of Las Vegas. Art Cheney, a Western air lines pilot, said he had flown over this section and seen a large fire on Table Rock Mountain. This is one of the snow-covered peaks between Nevada and Death Valley. Nobody could say for sure whether it was a forest fire or a burning plane. The Las Vegas police had already sent two ambulances to the scene. Twenty-five more cars full of soldiers, cowboys, ranchers and miners were following the ambulances.

To Gable it seemed an eternity before the chartered plane reached Las Vegas. The ship's radio meanwhile gave out no new details. Just the same old thing: Carole Lombard, one of the world's most beloved film stars, and her mother, Mrs. Elizabeth Peters, were in the missing plane.

From the airport Gable and his friends raced to the Las Vegas police station. No, they didn't know anything for sure as yet. "Sorry, Mr. Gable!" And it might be quite a while before they did know anything definite. If the plane had crashed up there on Table Rock Mountain it was going to be a hell of a time. There were no roads, only snow-covered trails. No car ever made could get a man there. You took a car to the bottom of the hill, then went the rest of the way on foot. They'd sent pack horses and plenty of stretchers, a seventy-year-old Indian guide. But it might be as much as 24 hours before they reached the scene.

"Twenty-four hours!" Clark groaned. "They could all freeze to death up there by then."

"I know," said the sheriff. He averted his eyes. He himself was fairly certain that everybody in the plane had been killed.

Another rescue party was forming and Gable wanted to join it. His companions felt he was near breaking-point, and did their best to dissuade him. "God damn it!" Gable kept yelling. "I'll go mad if I can't do something about her."

They had an awful time with him. He didn't talk much. He didn't

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cry. The grief, the torment of fearing the worst but not really knowing, was all kept inside him, boiling, churning up. "Hard to describe it," said one man who was with him that night, "but imagine the biggest, strongest, most vicious animal hurt, cut to pieces—well, that's how he was that night."

Then someone said something that made sense. "Suppose they bring her back, Clark. and you're not here to greet her?" Reluctantly, Gable consented to waiting in one of the cottages of El Rancho Vegas. He sat there for hours, trembling, all tightened up, breathing hard, like some huge caged animal.

Chunky little Eddie Mannix, over fifty, was the one who went out with the second rescue party. He had been a fighter, a wrestler, a bouncer in an amusement park in his youth, but his youth was long gone.

But Eddie went, dreading what he would see, fearing in his heart that Carole Lombard, the little woman who was all firecracker, was dead.

All fatal plane crashes, as he knew, are alike. They have achieved the impossible; made horror and grotesque death a monotonous commonplace.

You could read harrowing descriptions of a hundred crashes though without knowing what one is like. You have to watch a plane explode in the air, come close afterwards and see the blood that is smeared wherever you look, smell the burned flesh, and only then can you know how dreadful death in the air can be in this, our well-oiled and machine-driven twentieth century.

This is what middle-aged Eddie Mannix knew he was walking into as he climbed trails so rough and studded with stones that his sixty-dollar shoes got ripped to ribbons. For the last seven miles he had to wade through snow that was waist-high. Up, up, up and on and on he went, the wind clawing at his clothes, forcing him at every step to stop and catch his breath.

When he finally got there, after all that struggling, he could find precious little of Carole to identify. She had been wearing the long black gloves and the strapless evening dress when she got on the plane, but her face was gone and most of her body. Mannix saw a burned script lying in the snow and supposed she had been reading that when the end came.

There were a few strands of her hair, unmistakable because it was the lightest blonde hair in show business. The best furs she had been wearing and her other clothes were burned beyond recognition. But

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Mannix did find a pair of earrings with diamond chips in them. They had been a gift from Clark and he slipped them into his pocket to return them to his friend. Later, Carole's dentist in Hollywood had to wire a description of her teeth. Those and the strands of blonde hair had to serve the purpose of identification in the end.

When morning came to the mountain it became obvious what had happened.

There was a telltale smudge along the rocky face of the mountain, only two hundred feet from the top. Apparently the transport plane had grazed a rocky projection, then veered straight into the peak's vertical rock wall. The plane had caught fire, exploded and broken into two halves, and fallen into a ravine hundreds of feet deep, throwing the twenty-two persons aboard over an area covering many square yards. The blazing plane had set afire a whole section of woods in the ravine. A CAB investigation later established that the plane had been 6.7 miles off its course, had been flying at 8,200 feet instead of the prescribed 10,000-foot altitude. It had struck the peak head-on while going at a speed of more than 150 miles per hour.

The blood-chilling job of recovering and bringing down the bodies, wrapped in army blankets, from the mountain took many hours. One pack horse was said to have slipped in the snow and tumbled with his burden hundreds of feet below.

When Eddie Mannix, half-unconscious from exhaustion, got back to Las Vegas and turned over the diamond chip earrings to Clark, he thanked God that his friend had already been told that it was useless hoping any longer. Clark asked, "You think she knew just before?"

"No," he was told. "It all happened too quickly."

But that was the solitary grain of comfort anyone could offer him. Clark had one request. He asked that he be driven to some spot from which he could see the mountain. Taken there he walked a little way from the car and looked at the peak which most people now call Carole Lombard Mountain. It was as though he wanted to be alone for a few moments to say good-bye to the wife whose delicate hands had lifted him up so high that the whole world seemed full of kindness and smiles and happy people.

Once the uncertainty was removed, and the grim truth accepted, Clark was able to function. He went alone to the mortuary and selected the caskets for his people. With that finished he went and helped serve steaks he bought to the weary searchers who had come back. For a minute he watched a toothless old cowboy struggling with his meat.

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He slipped a \$100 bill into a deputy sheriff's hand, and said, "For God's sake, buy him some teeth."

A coroner's inquest was held at once over Carole's remains, so he could take her home for burial. But Gable refused to leave until whatever was left of Carole's mother was also found and identified. When that was done, he said, he would go home with the bodies of the two women and his friend, Winkler.

He made arrangements for a double funeral. The sort, he believed, that his wife would have wanted, a funeral for Mrs. Elizabeth K. Peters and her daughter, Jane Peters Gable.

The funeral was about as quiet as a Hollywood funeral can be. Reporters and photographers scrambled for the bereaved celebrity's attention only outside the cemetery. There was the usual covey of celebrities and 400 floral pieces, some costing a fortune, some consisting of twenty-five-cent gardenias from fans who might be short of cash, but who felt that when Carole died they had lost a friend who would never be replaced.

All of Mrs. Peters's friends were there, but not all of Carole's. Fieldsie was the only one who could have made up such a list and she was too grief-stricken.

Some film people not invited were hurt. But Mitchell Leisen, who had directed *True Confession* and others of Carole's best pictures, called up afterwards, and said, "You forgot to call me, Fieldsie, but I'm not hurt. I just went ahead and held services of my own."

Carole was considered America's first World War II casualty.

The next day Clark accompanied Jill Winkler, the widow of his friend Otto, to the funeral of her husband. He felt responsible in no small measure for Winkler's death, having urged him to go on the tour. He told M-G-M he never wanted another personal publicity man assigned to him.

Afterwards, it was said, he waived his own claims against the company on condition that Mrs. Winkler be paid \$100,000 by TWA for the loss of her husband. Hollywood also heard that he had paid off the mortgage on her home and financed her in a business venture.

(But some of this, at least, seems to have been rumour. For after Clark died, Mrs. Winkler, who had married again, sued the star's estate for \$100,000. She said that he had promised to establish a \$100,000 annuity for her if she did not sue TWA for damages in connexion with her husband's death, but had not done it.)

Before resuming his work the tragedy had interrupted, Clark went

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with a friend, Harry Fleischman, to a place he'd bought some time before on the Rouge River, in Oregon, and stayed there for several weeks. Then he went back before the cameras to finish *Somewhere I'll Find You*.

Gable looked and behaved as he always had. He was cheerful and smiled a lot, was courteous and glad to see everybody again. But no one is ever the same after such a blow. His friends realized that.

For years Clark continued to talk about Carole as though she were still alive, as though she might possibly reappear one day like a woman in a story who has mysteriously vanished. He would frequently talk to Fieldsie and Al Menasco and Mrs. Menasco about her.

"Did you ever see anyone more beautiful? Was there ever a kinder woman or one more full of fun?" And then sometimes he would add bitterly, "Why did *she* have to go?"

And those who loved him and had loved Carole could only sit by and try to reason which would hurt him the least: talking with him about her, or keeping silent. He was such a strong and dignified man that their hearts ached for him. Why indeed *did* she have to go, at thirty-two, fabulously successful in her profession and rich with the love of the man she adored? They all knew how much it had meant to her to see him laughing, and of her plan to give back the youth he had been cheated of.

All her friends had wonderful memories of her.

The previous July Al Menasco had mentioned that one thing always annoyed him during his business trips to New York. "I simply don't have time to visit the stores during the day. And then at night, when they are all closed, I walk down Fifth Avenue looking at the shop windows, seeing things I want. I promise myself I'll make time and get around next day. But somehow I never can manage it."

"What sort of things, Al?" she asked.

He described a set of road maps that rolled up into a little box that was small enough to put into the compartment of his car. Then there was a small tool kit, equally compact. He'd been looking for something like that for years.

"In what store did you see those things?" she asked.

"Some store with a funny name," he told her.

"Oh Fifty-seventh Street?"

"That's it."

"Hammacher Schlemmer?"

"That's the one!"

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On Christmas morning Al Menasco was startled to get both novelties as presents from Carole. She had seemed casual enough months before when they had their little talk. He imagined she must have written down a description of the roll-up map and the tool kit as soon as he left, sent for them, and kept them for all those months.

Fieldsie alone had a hundred and one such memories.

When *Somewhere I'll Find You* (and was there ever a more savagely ironical title?) was finished, Gable joined the Army—as a private. Fieldsie said that Carole would have had him go in as a major-general if she'd had her way.

But Al Menasco recalls telephoning Carole shortly after the United States got into the war. He'd heard Clark had gone to Washington.

"What is he trying to do, get himself a commission?" he asked.

"Don't you believe that about my old man," Carole replied. "The last thing he'd want is one of those phoney commissions. He just called up and said he was coming home."

What had happened was that Clark had talked to General "Hap" Arnold in Washington. He said he wanted to get into the Army Air Corps, but not in a job that he was not entitled to or did not know. General Arnold advised him the quickest way was to enlist and apply for admission to the OCS.

Everybody thought it was great—except one man, Gable's favourite director, Victor Fleming, who had been pleading with Gable that he could do the country far more good by playing Eddie Rickenbacker in a film biography he wanted to make of America's No. 1 ace of World War 1.

He asked Menasco one night, "How can that guy make better use of himself: by trying to do something, any healthy twenty-year-old kid can do better or by telling the story of our greatest fighting flyer?"

"Have you talked to Clark about it?"

"I've tried. And that big stupid Pennsylvania Dutchman won't even discuss it. It's enough to drive a man nuts." Then the angry Fleming paid the friend he was denouncing an amazing compliment. "We've had giants like Marconi, Steinmetz, Edison and Ford in this century. But," he said, "believe me, Al, when this present era becomes as remote as the Stone Age is now they'll still be talking about Gable. He will be a bigger American legend than John Bunyan and all of the rest of them combined. He's the representative man of our time. No one will ever forget him. But look at him—in the Army just like millions of ordinary

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Joes, instead of making the sort of propaganda picture the country needs!"

Many thousands of words have been written about Clark's experiences in the Army. But the central fact has never been stressed: it was a nightmare for him—from beginning to end.

He went in at the age of forty-one, king of the world's most glamorous profession and at a time when he was suffering from the most shattering personal grief of his life. No greater evidence of his rocklike character, his physical endurance and moral courage can be found than that he never cracked up in the Army, complained or tried to get out.

By a happy accident, on the same day that Gable enlisted, August 12, 1942, Andy J. McIntyre, an assistant film cameraman, also joined the Army and applied for admission to the Officers Candidate School. They went to Miami together.

They discovered quickly that the Army dealt out a severe beating to everyone who took the course—on purpose. They reasoned that if you could not take everything they could do to you at school you'd surely go to pieces in actual combat.

And the man they called the King of Hollywood, and who had earned \$357,000 in 1941 but was now working for Uncle Sam for \$66 a month, was treated no better than anyone else. The first thing they did was to make him shave off his moustache and get an Army-type haircut. Then, with Andy McIntyre, he was assigned to scrubbing the floor of the lobby of the Collins Park Hotel. It was raining that day, men walked in and out. Andy and Clark just kept on scrubbing.

Part of the training was to stand at attention while an officer asked you personal questions that made you want to belt him in the nose. Gable answered the very insulting personal questions quietly and without showing a trace of annoyance. The girls and women who hung around the barracks waiting to see him annoyed him far more. Every time he was on guard duty they marched with him on the other side of the wire fence. They'd throw notes to him, begging for dates.

It had been like that all of the way from Los Angeles. Nobody was supposed to know what train he was on, but the women of America somehow or other found out. They jammed the station platform in every city where his train stopped, screamed for a glimpse of him in uniform.

At New Orleans they'd managed to delay him so much that he was a day late in reporting for duty at Miami. Later the Army found it

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necessary to issue a press release saying "Lieutenant Gable will appreciate it if the public will not interfere with his training. He wishes to be treated like every other member of the Service."

At Miami, first call in the morning was at 4.15. You fell in at 4.30, were dismissed to return to barracks, perhaps just to change your hat. Then you were marched for a mile and a half to two miles before breakfast. You were forbidden to smoke on the street and had to ask permission to get your laundry.

One day John Lee Mahin, Gable's friend and the 'M-G-M' writer of many of his best pictures, saw him pounding around the track for enlisted men with men half his age.

Getting into OCS automatically promoted a man from private to corporal. Gable was put into Squadron I, whose members were known as The Iron Men of I. "The other guys," says McIntyre, "hated to be in that squadron. It was the first squadron on parade. We would have to stand at attention while all of the other squadrons in the vicinity passed us."

The other men, who averaged about half Clark's age, were a little shy and suspicious of him at first, but one day in the washroom he took out his upper denture and waved it. *

"Look at the King," he said with a booming laugh, "the King of Hollywood. Sure looks like the Jack now, doesn't he?"

What McIntyre prefers not to talk about was the thing that worried Clark most. He discovered in the training school that the physical conditioning, tough as it was for a middle-aged man, was less difficult than studying textbooks. This was something he had not excelled at even as a child. And there was plenty to learn: thirty hours of military law transportation, supply, military correspondence, mess, speech, schooling. And if you flunked two courses you found yourself in the infantry. To his dismay, Clark found it almost impossible to understand some of the OCS courses. He sweated as he had on Coxcomb Hill, learning his first part. And with lights out early he was unable to study in his bunk at night. Even if he could he would not have wanted the boys to know. Each night, he would sneak off into the lavatory, go into a booth and sit on a toilet for hours while trying to cram the necessary information into his head. He passed the tests, but for only one reason: he memorized the problems and answers by learning them by heart, so many pages a night. He finished 700th in his class of 2,600. On being commissioned a second lieutenant he was sent to Flexible Gunnery School, at Panama City, Florida. From there he went to

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Seven Miles, the gunnery school at Fort George Wright, Spokane, Washington.

Something quite pleasing to him happened on the trip from Panama City to Spokane. At a stop in Alabama, an old Negro mammy, who hobbled down the platform with the aid of a cane, kept asking, "Is Mr. Rhett Butler there? Hold up there, Rhett Butler."

"What can I do for you, Mammy?" Clark asked.

"Mr. Rhett Butler, sir," she said, "could I have your autograph?"

The only pictures Clark had in his room were pictures of Carole. He carried the diamond chips that Eddie Mannix had handed him at Las Vegas in a little box suspended from his shirt. And he'd had someone put a metal front on his identification tag so that it opened up. Inside, along with his officer's serial number (0565390), his blood type and other necessary information, was a picture of Carole.

He was transferred to the 34th Bomb Group, a B-24 outfit, and finally to the 351st Bomb Group Heavy. Sent to England, he was promoted to the rank of Captain. This was a routine promotion, because the heavy-bomber group lost men so fast that promotions for the survivors were always swift.

In England the girls were just as Gable-crazy as in the U.S.A. Wherever he was based, the local farmers complained that they couldn't get their "land girls" to do their work. The girls spent all their time hanging around the gates of his base, and when he did appear, the English land girls couldn't keep their hands off him. Several times they mobbed him while he was walking through the nearby village. Souvenir hunters ripped buttons from his tunic. Once they forced him to seek refuge in a church.

But reporters who got into the base found that Gable had even more trouble from high-ranking officers who sought him out, invited him to their dinners and parties. "They virtually refuse to permit him to associate with captains and other officers of lower rank," wrote one astonished journalist. "Gable almost has to insult his superiors, as well as his fans and correspondents, to get his work done."

His principal job for the Eighth Army Air Force turned out to be the making of a training film. General Arnold appointed him head of the unit that was organized in the summer of 1943. Captain Gable at once asked for the services of McIntyre and Captain Mahin. He himself worked a double job as photographer on Flying Fortresses and tail-gunner. He went on five bomber missions. On one of these over

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the Ruhr in a Fortress the men had named "Ain't I Gruesome?" a shrapnel burst blasted a turret just two feet from his head.

Gable never stopped trying to deglamourize himself. He was appalled by the number of jaunty young men half his age he had seen go off on missions and return crippled or dead, though in many cases their plane did not come back at all. He tried to tell correspondents who interviewed him about the feats of these wonderful youngsters. They seemed to him the finest group of young men the world had ever seen.

He said that the young airmen he was working with were the only ones worth writing anything about.

But Gable, of course, also understood the correspondents' problem. They'd been instructed to get everything they could about him, but he talked as little about himself as possible.

"Didn't know it had happened," he told the correspondents after the Ruhr raid he was on. "I didn't know anything about it until we had dropped eleven thousand feet. Only then did I see the hole in the turret." On that trip, "Ain't I Gruesome?" had been forced to dodge five head-on attacks by enemy fighters and had come back with fifteen flak holes.

Johnny Mahin recalls, though, that there was one thing that Clark Gable did fear: this was being captured by the Germans.

"There is one thing I'll never do," he told the writer. "I'll never bail out. If I ever fall into Hitler's hands the sonofabitch will put me in a cage like a big gorilla. He'd exhibit me all over Germany."

Gable was the Fuehrer's favourite American screen actor, though Clark wasn't boasting of it. He was considered such a prize catch that Hermann Goering, Hitler's Air Minister, announced that the flyer who downed Gable, dead or alive, would be given \$5,000, a promotion and a furlough.

Their group was commanded by Colonel William Hatcher, and was called "Hatcher's Chickens". When the squadron flew in forty planes from Gander to a base in England, the flyers found out how fast and reliable the enemy's information on their movements was. That day they were just sitting down to mess when Lord Haw Haw, the broadcaster of German propaganda who had a British accent, said over the radio, "Welcome to England, Hatcher's Chickens, among whom is the famous American cinema star, Clark Gable. We'll be seeing you soon in Germany, Clark. You will be welcome there, too."

There was resentment among the enlisted men because Gable, an

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officer, was working as a gunner, a job usually done by an uncommissioned man. They thought if he was doing that work he shouldn't have been given a commission. What they overlooked was that Gable worked as a gunner while trying to shoot the film for his training films. His fifth combat mission was over Nantes, France, in another Flying Fortress, "The Duchess". This time he took his pictures from the waist of the ship though he manned the nose gun while over the target.

On coming back he said, "It wasn't quite as tough as the Ruhr. But it was tough enough. I could see the German pilot's features. That guy won't be around very long if he keeps on doing that. I don't know how we missed him. I didn't hit a damned thing myself." He was awarded the Air Medal after completing that mission.

In October, Gable and Mahin returned to the United States with fifty thousand feet of film they'd shot. They were going to have it processed at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's studios. Mahin was to write the commentary and Gable would deliver it. Military officers say it is one of the best training films ever made.

On the way home, they stopped at Washington. Gable wrecked the day's work at the Pentagon when he dropped in to chat with Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson. Every secretary in that vast building deserted her desk. They ignored the orders of their bosses and blocked the corridors leading from Secretary Stimson's office as they waited for their dream lover to come out.

One evening Gable put in a person-to-person call to Hollywood from his hotel room in Washington. "This is Clark Gable," he started to say. The next thing he knew the phone went dead. Later he and Mahin found out that the operator who answered had fainted dead away.

Something almost as odd had happened in New Orleans while he was talking to a girl in Hollywood. Suddenly she said, "Be careful of what you say, Clark. Someone is listening in."

"Nonsense," he said, "you're just imagining things."

"No, she isn't," said the operator. "I'm listening in, Mr. Gable. Please let me."

But Clark, adored by women all of his life, very rarely talked about them to his friends. However, Mahin felt that he would take any woman at all who offered herself, if he was in the mood. He recalls joking with Clark once while they were in the Service. It was about an affair Gable was having with the sister of one of their commanding officers.

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The lady was at least five years older than Clark, wore thick glasses and had the ankles of a Swiss mountain climber.

"For God's sake," Mahin remarked. "How can you bother with her, Clark, with every other woman in the world dreaming of you nights?"

"She is kind of homely, isn't she?" Gable said sheepishly. "But she makes no trouble. And sometimes these homely ones are the best kind, easy to please and they sure are grateful afterwards."

While working with Gable during the war, Mahin had a conversation with Clark. That night they were lying in their bunks at an English airfield waiting to fall asleep. Gable suddenly asked him, "You don't believe all of that hooey, John, do you?"

"About what?" asked Mahin.

For a moment there was no answer from the other bunk, but John knew that his friend must be thinking about Carole, the cruelty and uselessness of her death, and also of the many young men, handsome and healthy and good of heart, who flew away whistling only to die a few hours later when their planes were shot out of the sky.

"All that hooey about religion," Clark said finally.

"Well, I was raised in a religious family. I don't go to church now, but I believe in God. Is that what you mean, Clark, that you don't believe in God?"

"What I believe in," Clark Gable said very earnestly, "is the love of a good woman for a good man. That's what I believe in."

"If you believe in that," said John Lee Mahin, "we have been talking about the same thing. You believe in God whether you realize it or not."

The King with the Torch

AFTER each of his marriages Clark Gable swore lustily that he would never marry again.

But he said it most often and most earnestly after he lost Carole. On returning with Johnny Mahin to Hollywood to process the AAF training film, he received a hero's welcome. Everybody on the lot rushed out to pump his hand and slap him on the back. Again he seemed the same old King, just as smiling, friendly, debonair, courteous and self-confident as ever.

One reason the training film was so good was that Clark, both as commentator and actor, seemed his old self in it. His friends were reassured on seeing it. He had been so withdrawn after Carole's death they had been worrying about what he'd be like, even if he came back whole and physically well. No one could anticipate what being in a savage, all-out war will do to the mind of a man who has just lost his wife. But here he was, the same old rock of strength and manliness, the one man in a million who could take anything.

And in many characteristics Clark had not changed. Ralph Wheelwright found that out when he took a trip to Washington with Clark shortly before June 14, 1944, when the star was released from service. For his work on the training film Gable was being promoted to the rank of "temporary major".

On the return trip their train, like all trains in that wartime, was overcrowded. Gable and Wheelwright were able to get only a compartment to share. The heat was oppressive. And when they went to the diner they found the aisle at each end of it jammed with people,

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mostly GIs, waiting for tables. When the servicemen saw Clark they pushed him and Wheelwright to the head of the line. All that did was make Clark uncomfortable. When they were seated he looked around at the gang waiting at both ends of the dining-car. Then, he whispered to Wheelwright, "Gosh, I couldn't eat one damn thing here. What about you?"

Wheelwright knew how hungry Clark was, for he was just as hungry himself. But he was sure that he couldn't eat anything either with all of those famished-looking GIs watching.

Much to the astonishment of their captive audience, the two men got up and returned to their steaming compartment. After a while Gable said, "I'm hungry as hell, aren't you?"

Ralph said he was. Gable got out a bottle of whisky and they had a drink. But the water in the compartment was warm. The porter was unable to get ice. No food, either. Gable scratched his head and asked sadly, "Think we could get a bottle of ginger ale, or something?"

"And," says Wheelwright, "that's what the King and I dined on that night, a bottle of ginger ale each."

No, Clark had not lost his kind heart. David Selznick also learned that. Soon after the war he ran into Gable at a party. Though David had never suspected it, Clark had always resented getting so small a cut of the fabulous earnings of *Gone With the Wind*. Besides his regular M-G-M salary Gable had been paid a \$100,000 bonus by Selznick on signing the deal to make the picture. It then seemed plenty because everybody but Selznick and a few others were still thinking it would lose money. When the millions started to roll in, Clark had a second thought about this. But M-G-M gave him not one extra dime.

At the party he rushed up to Selznick and threw his arm around him.

"I'm so glad to see you. You don't know it but I have an apology to make to you. I was flying over Berlin on my first mission, and I was scared to death. I was sure I was going to die. And for some reason you came to my mind. And I said to myself, 'What have I got against that man? He has never been anything but kind to me. My best picture was produced by him. He did me nothing but good. He paid a fortune for me even if I didn't get it.' And I said to myself, 'If I get out of this alive and get back to Hollywood, I'm going to apologize to him.' And I now keep that promise."

Clark told Selznick later on, "The only thing that has kept me a big star has been the revivals of *Gone With the Wind*. Every time that

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picture is re-released a whole new crop of young movie-goers gets interested in me."

About the same time, another Hollywood celebrity got into a scandal that menaced his career.

"What's wrong with that guy?" Menasco asked him after reading a scarifying story about this actor.

"I don't know," Clark said, "but he was always a good guy before, so I guess he still is." And then he added, "Anyway, you don't let your friends down just because they're in trouble, do you?"

On occasion, Clark could still be playful and a tease. One of Hollywood's veteran newspaperwomen tells a story about that.

"It is true that most of the time he was unactorish," she says, "but he could ham it up, dramatize a situation plenty when in the mood. What I have in mind is a crazy caper he pulled just to annoy me. The editor of a magazine I'd done a lot of writing for one year decided to visit Hollywood. She was one of the stoutest women I've ever seen outside of a freak show. Before she arrived, she wrote me a letter saying, 'There isn't much you can do for me out there, but one thing I would like. I must meet Clark Gable. I've wanted that since I was a young woman.'

"Well, I told Clark about that. I also explained that the woman weighed three hundred and fifty pounds. 'You'll be doing a great favour to me if you would meet her.' 'Okay,' he said. When she arrived I called him up. He said 'Bring her out to M-G-M tomorrow at three. You'll find me working on Stage Seven.'

"Well, I got there and could not find Clark on Stage Seven or anywhere else on the lot, including the men's room. The man at the gate said he had not come in. We combed the studio. No Clark!

"My rather large friend was heartbroken. I couldn't understand it. Clark doing this. He was always so punctual and punctilious about keeping appointments. Just when we were ready to leave, he came whirling up to us from around the corner in his big car. He jumped out, gave me hardly a glance, held out his hand to the editor and said, 'I'm Clark Gable.' And he paid court to that fat woman for ten minutes and as though she were a queen.

"He had delayed his entrance just to tease me, even got the gateman to say he wasn't on the lot. Then he watched me from around the corner getting angrier and angrier. Just like a big kid, you see. But who wouldn't love him for taking the trouble to make that huge woman happy?

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"She had long suffered from insomnia. And as we left, she said, 'Now when I can't sleep nights, I'll have something to think about.' And the thought of how nice Clark had been to her kept her warm and smiling, I know, for a long time."

He had retained his modesty also.

Keith Monroe found this out. Though a well-known magazine writer, it took Monroe fifteen years to get through the "protective walls" of M-G-M's publicity department to interview Gable. Before Monroe was permitted to see the star he was warned to take up only fifteen minutes of Clark's valuable time.

"What's this all about?" Gable asked. "What are we going to talk about?"

"I'm supposed to write your life story," said Monroe, "but I only have fifteen minutes to do it in."

Gable laughed, and asked, "What are we going to do with the other seven minutes?"

Because of his pride, it was impossible to complain of how he felt. Johnny Mahin put it best when he said, "Clark would only go with his troubles to those friends who could help him."

And now he went to no one. Because there was no one who could help him by bringing Carole back to life. There was no one who could help him forget those boys whom he had watched fly off so gallantly to their deaths over countries whose people they did not know and whose language they had never heard.

It was one thing to him to portray Rhett Butler crying and feeling sorry for himself—and he'd only done that at the insistence of his producer. Real life was something else.

Sometimes he wished Mahin hadn't told him the story of Leslie Fenton, an English actor-director who had joined the British Army. Fenton was wounded and taken to a hospital. In his room was another serviceman bandaged from head to toe. There were spaces in the bandages over his eyes so he would see. He recognized Fenton and mentioned seeing him in a war film. He said, "But the bullets are real now, aren't they, Mr. Fenton?"

Clark flung himself into work on the farm. He worked on his cars. One of his and Al Menasco's pastimes was switching engines from one car to another. There were always four or five cars of different makes standing in or around his garage.

He also started to drink a lot more than ever before, but few people indeed ever saw him act as though drunk.

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One Hollywoodite explains, "He had to be drunk because of the enormous quantities he'd put away in a night. But his tongue did not fuzz words. His speech did not become erratic. He did not become bad-tempered. The only way I could tell when he was swacked was when he would try to get through a doorway. He would always walk sideways then."

"I never saw a man who could drink as he did," says Al Menasco. "I'd bought many cases of Old Rarity Scotch whisky some years before. I'd got it at a good price. He liked that twelve-year-old or more stuff. He also very much liked Black Label Whisky. Clark could put away three-quarters of a fifth or a whole bottle of Scotch before dinner without showing any effects. We would join my wife. His eyes would light up on seeing Julie. He would comment on the dress she was wearing or some little new thing she had done to the house. Or he'd talk to her about our boys.

"He never had to pretend or put it on with Mrs. Menasco. But he was like that with most of the women who were wives of his friends. However, the point I'm trying to make is how little that whisky affected him when he could talk to her like that."

Another describes Gable as drinking like a man "with twenty pounds of blotting paper in his stomach".

Nevertheless, there were rare occasions when Clark did show the effects of drink. One such night occurred late in March, when he was preparing to make his first picture at M-G-M since coming out of the Army. Ralph Wheelwright, a pretty flashy man at the wheel himself, never has forgotten the hair-raising ride Gable gave him one evening.

They'd been waiting for a studio car to take them to a preview. Getting tired, Clark suggested they go in his Ford coupé. On the way they were spotted by a couple of elegant young females in a Cadillac. They shrieked "Clark Gable!" and started to pursue the Ford. To shake them off, Gable slammed his car through alleys, parking lots and more alleys. Wheelwright swears they got through some of these safely only by two-inch margins. When Gable had lost the two lovestruck *femmes* he slowed up.

Wheelwright, once he got his breath back, asked, "Next time this happens, don't you think it might be both easier and safer to give them a nod and a snuffle?"

Oddly enough, it was Wheelwright, plus some luck, who saved the King from an ocean of nasty publicity after the 1945 incident. At 4.30 a.m.

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Clark was driving the wrong way on Sunset Boulevard. In Brentwood he whirled into the Bristol Circle and kept going around and around. Apparently, he realized he should head the opposite way, but was too befogged by booze to manage to do it. Unable to get his bearings, he lost control of his Duesenberg, which mounted the sidewalk and crashed into a big tree. The shattered glass cut a long gash in his leg and cut his face. He was covered from head to foot with blood by the time the owner of the property came running out and got him into the house.

That's where the luck came in. The owner of the property was Harry Friedman, vice-president of the Music Corporation of America, the talent agency. Mr. Friedman knew how much a star could be hurt by being arrested for drunk driving, something that is news everywhere. With a star of Gable's rank, it is front-page stuff.

On getting Clark into the house Mr. Friedman called up Strickling, who lived miles away. Strickling called Ralph Wheelwright, who happened to live a half-block from Bristol Circle. Almost before he got there Wheelwright had a story for the press cooked up. Gable hadn't been drunk and driving in the wrong direction at all. Oh no, it was another fellow. The only reason that Clark crashed into the tree was to avoid a head-on collision with this irresponsible fool.

The police accepted this yarn. So did the reporters.

Wheelwright drove his friend to the Cedars of Lebanon Hospital. Cursing and muttering, Clark walked into the institution under his own power. On the way up to the room assigned to him, the elevator operator recognized the blood-smearred love king, and said, "Gee, Mr. Gable, it's a pleasure to have you riding in my car. Could I have your autograph?"

Clark's first picture on rejoining the studio was *Adventure*, which co-starred Greer Garson. He hated it, even though Victor Fleming directed. In the first place he did not get along well with Miss Garson. He seldom enjoyed working with an intellectual woman like her or Rosalind Russell. He did not deny they were brighter than he was. What he objected to was their flaunting it.

"It is lousy," he told everyone, including the press, soon after the picture was previewed.

"I could tell because I had to work so hard. A picture that is going to turn out well is easy to do. It just seems to flow along by itself. Everybody on it has a swell time. Nobody strains because he doesn't

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have to. And it all comes out fine. When you are on a bad picture you find everybody working like hell, and nothing comes of it." Gable blamed Fleming for tacking on a sentimental scene with a baby in it for the finish.

When M-G-M officials pointed out that the picture was making millions of dollars Gable was not impressed. He knew, without being coy about it, that this was because the fans were curious to see him again.

But nothing made Gable angrier than M-G-M's big advertising slogan for that picture: GABLE'S BACK AND GARSON'S GOT HIM. That was bad enough until some newspaper wag, after seeing the picture, added "*And they deserve each other.*"

He so disliked *The Hucksters*, the next story M-G-M wanted him to do, that he invoked a privilege he rarely employed. He insisted that the story be rewritten completely. His objection was based on the scoundrelly character of the advertising man he was to play.

"I hate heels," he said, "and this guy is a heel."

The picture did a lot for Ava Gardner, who is still grateful for the encouragement he gave her. "Nobody," says Ava, "ever gave me the feeling of self-confidence that Clark did when we worked together. I never had that before. I hope I'll never lose it." He also coached Ava for her role in *Show Boat* though he was not in that picture himself.

There was the inevitable talk of romance between him and Ava. He told one reporter, "If I had all of the romances with young girls that I'm supposed to have I'd never have time to go fishing, much less make pictures."

The studio looked the same. But somehow it wasn't the same. For one thing the bubbling fun he'd found on the set along with the grief, the hair-pulling, the daily crises and incessant clash of overblown egos, was gone.

Like the whole dizzy, sputtering and whirling world outside, the studios had become sombre places. On one hand was a new monstrous menace called television. It had been waiting for the end of the war to steal away the films' millions of customers. Most of the big shots tried to laugh at it as they had laughed at films that talked eighteen years before. But once again the menace gave no sign of disappearing.

From the start Gable refused to make television appearances. "The movies have given me everything I have," he replied to all offers. "Why should I hurt the business done by the movies I'm in, and which people have to pay to see, by appearing in shows they can see for nothing?"

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The studios were also being squeezed by skyrocketing costs. Despite everything they tried to do, these continued to go up. By 1947 it cost more than a million dollars to make a picture which would have cost \$350,000 in 1936. Loew's, Inc., showed a record income of \$18,000,000 in 1946, but two years later this had fallen to \$4,212,000, or less than a fourth of that.

Any one picture now could be a financial disaster. The heads of the studios tried to avoid this by making sure-fire films, which meant less experimenting, taking fewer chances than ever.

Gable felt lost at the studio when in 1947 Dore Scharf, the writer, was suddenly made head of all production. Scharf was a liberal thinker and wanted to make pictures with ideas in them. Gable could not understand this. He thought the only purpose a film should have is entertainment.

What Scharf says he found out was "you could never join issue with Gable. He would look intently at you when you said anything. When you were finished he would say, 'That's what you *really* think, eh, kid?' And you'd walk away imagining he knew a hell of a lot about the subject, but not knowing whether he agreed with you or not." Scharf had rough going. The picture-business continued sliding downhill while he was M-G-M's head man, and he came up with no miracles to stop the inroads of TV's free entertainment. Gable continued to have bad pictures. Worse, practically none of them made money. This though millions of Clark's fans remained faithful to him. But he remained securely on his throne, for among the younger actors there was no one at all who appealed to the public on the scale he still did.

Meanwhile, little was going right in his personal life. During Christmas week of 1947 he indignantly resigned from his favourite gun club at Bakersfield. That Christmas week he arrived on a Saturday but did no shooting because he wasn't feeling well. At four o'clock on Sunday afternoon, Clark, Mr. O. O. Dull, founder of the club, and Frank Morgan, the character actor, started to drive away but stopped on seeing a pile of ducks, including spooners, pintails and teal, lying on the dock.

"Suppose some of the boys shot more than the limit, and just left them there," said Mr. Dull disapprovingly. "Well, I better gather them up."

If left lying around, the ducks attracted rats or the dogs got at them and chewed them up, leaving an unsightly mess. Gable jumped out to

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help him. Morgan, who was fat and lazy, did not even get out of the car.

As Clark and Dull picked up a half-dozen each of the birds a pair of California game wardens stepped out from behind the house and handed them summonses for breaking the state game laws. A bag of four birds was the limit.

"Now it was colder than Billy-be-damned that week-end," says Mr. Dull. "Neither Gable nor I had had a boot on all week-end. But the wardens wouldn't listen to that story. There were five other club members given summonses on the same charge."

Within hours the news CLARK GABLE CITED ON GAME LAW CHARGE was circling the globe. Radios were broadcasting "the news" that the King had been caught with twenty-five birds, Frank Morgan with thirteen, the others with a varying number.

"I guess," says Mr. Dull, "that the International News Service which had the scoop figured that if Clark only was two ducks over the limit it wouldn't be much of a yarn. But twenty-five! That really made him a rotten sportsman!"

The first impulse of the M-G-M hush-hush battalion was to get the charges squashed. General "Hap" Arnold, Clark's friend, happened to be the State Game and Fishing Commissioner, and he was outraged by the frame-up. The Governor of California was also willing to drop the right word to the judge who'd sit on the case.

But then the hush-hush men decided that this might steam up the papers into making a second hullabaloo. They could visualize the headline: WHO PUT THE FIX IN FOR THE WEALTHY MOVIE STAR?" Clark, Frank Morgan and some of the others were tried, found guilty and fined \$200 each.

Clark resigned. He felt that the members who had shot the birds should have come forward and exonerated him. He also blamed the community for the injustice. After that, he would not even drive through Bakersfield if he could avoid it.

"He never got over it," says Z. Wayne Griffin, his friend and one-time agent and business partner. "Every once in a while, right up until he died, he would bring it up again. He couldn't understand his friends and fellow club members letting him take the blame. As a sportsman he would have died rather than do that to anyone. He just couldn't understand another hunter doing it to him."

About the time of that incident Clark got another sporting interest in life, one that gave his studio the horrors. He became a motor-cycle

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hot-rodder. He bought a Harley-Davidson, and Al Menasco got one, too. It became a fad of the middle-aged sporting set of Hollywood to go off in a pack every week-end. Sometimes there were as many as fifty in their week-end road parties.

"Motor-cycles are things you work on for two hours, then ride for fifteen minutes," Menasco says.

Sometimes Clark went off on hunting trips with Menasco. Once on the way back he got Al to detour hundreds of miles so he could get a look at Bigheart, where his father had made him work so hard.

"My God!" Clark exclaimed when he saw the place. "It hasn't changed a bit."

From the day he came home he had kept saying, "Gotta sell the house. If it's the last thing I do, I'm gonna sell it."

Many Hollywoodites say that he gave orders that Carole's bedroom was to be kept exactly as it was on the day she left on the tour. The maid was told that if it was necessary to move anything when cleaning—the perfume bottles, the brushes and combs and pins, the dresses and other clothes in her wardrobe—it must be put back exactly. It was the same with her four-poster bed with the starched white canopy and the bedclothes. The most-loved man on earth for a long time lived with a ghost.

One night Whitney Bolton was driving home late from a party. He saw a light flickering in Gable's house as he passed it. He stopped the car and walked up to the house.

Bolton stared through the window. Gable was sitting there all alone looking at an old film that Carole had made before she met him.

Carole was reputed to have left more than a million. It was a substantial fortune, but nothing approaching that. Henry Morrissey, a California State tax appraiser, fixed the total value of her estate at \$296,417.80. Her last will and testament was dated August 8, 1939. That was a little more than four months after she became Mrs. Gable. Clark was named sole executor. Except for small annuities bequeathed her two brothers and Fieldsie (they amounted to less than \$30,000), he was also sole beneficiary. There was a fourth annuity of slightly more than \$125,000 left to him.

There was only \$2,386.37 insurance. Her best furs and most expensive jewellery had been destroyed in the plane crash. Mr. Morrissey appraised the furs, other clothes and jewels in her home at \$19,260. The jewels listed included a ring with nine rubies and thirty-six

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diamonds, pins, necklaces, bracelets, earrings and other jewellery of lesser value.

Among the furs in her wardrobe were a white ermine cape, a sable scarf, beaver cape, sable-tail muff, long sable coat, cross fox cape, silver fox jacquette, a lynx jacquette, eight yards of marten seal, a silver fox neckpiece, a Persian lamb coat, a caracal jacquette and a fur-trimmed wool coat.

Mr. Morrissey also listed among Carole's assets three hunting guns—a 20-gauge Remington, a 410-gauge Winchester and a 12-gauge Browning; 230 New Hampshire chickens; a bedroom set; a Cadillac Eight which was sold for \$1,800. Also percentages on five pictures, *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, *They Knew What They Wanted*, *Vigil in the Night*, *In Name Only* and *To Be or Not to Be*. Her interest in these five properties was later valued at \$75,000.

Clark did not sell the farm—despite all his talk. He wished to cling to the memory of Carole, and every room in the house had been touched by the personality of the laughing, life-loving girl with the yellow hair. There was not a square foot of their twenty-two-acre ranch that they hadn't tramped over together, her hand clutching his arm tightly. She'd loved all their animals, Jenny the Mule, the horses, the cows, but most of all her New Hampshire Reds. She even knew how they differed from Rhode Island Reds, this girl who had known only the city until she met him.

Clark could sit in the Early American dining-room and admire Carole's pink and white Staffordshire china on the high shelves along one wall. Or he could walk around the farm looking at the shade trees, the eucalyptus and pepper, his citrus trees, and think of the different little things she had said while they were walking in this grove or that one. When a big tree blew down in a wind storm, she'd been almost sick. The man who had delivered it had forgotten to take it out of its tub.

He couldn't forget the funny tricks they'd played on one another, the crazy things that had happened. He'd whitewashed her once. She'd come out and found him gone mad with a new spraying device, and said, "You'll be whitewashing me, if I don't watch out!" And he had laughed, said "Watch out then!" and squirted the sprayer on her.

There was the time one of the cows had turned belligerent and chased him. Next day when he came home from the studio he found a toreador's outfit laid out on his bed.

How could he forget what happened when he brought her home a

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cougar? That was before she'd started going on the trips with him. As he was leaving with Dr. Thorpe that morning she'd called, "Bring me home a kitten, honey." He and Dr. Thorpe had the luck to get a young cougar alive. They'd had to build a big box for it. The cat howled and scratched. The horses were scared to death of it. But finally they'd got the snarling, spitting cat home. It raised hell on the farm, almost getting loose a couple of times. They'd finally sent it to M-G-M, where they kept it for years. Carole didn't ask him to bring home any kittens after that.

And how she'd laughed when a false radio report about his health had cost Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer thousands of dollars. He'd had an accident with his upper plate, in the middle of a picture. M-G-M had rushed him to the dentist. A dental mechanic had been commissioned to do the repair work on it and was told it must be ready first thing in the morning. They'd be unable to make any scenes until Clark got his teeth.

He grumbled that it would mean working all night. M-G-M said, "Work all night then. But have it ready." Gable had a bad cold that day. Carole said, "You get to bed, you reckless sonofabitch."

Somehow, a reporter heard about the cold and wrote a story about Clark being gravely ill. By the time it got on the radio, Clark was "being rushed to the hospital".

Hearing this on his radio, the technician, a newlywed, thought, Well, if he's that sick, he certainly won't be able to work tomorrow.

And he went home to his bride without finishing the job.

Shooting was held up all morning.

Once they had "aged" their beautiful pine table to make it look like an antique. They'd left it outside through the rainy season, then burned its surface with cigarette butts and beat it with chains until it looked almost as well bruised and long used as a fine old antique should.

Carole became hysterical the Sunday Clark and Al Menasco put up a new fence at the farm. They'd practically finished the job when old Will Gable drove up in his ancient Ford and looked it over. "Now, kid," he said to Clark, "you know I taught you to build fences better than that."

The kid and his friend had been nailing the boards to the posts at the same levels. Pa Will Gable pointed out that the fence would be much stronger and would last longer if the levels of the boards were at alternate heights. And he stayed there making sure that his "kid"

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and his equally middle-aged friend took them all down and nailed them up again the right way.

Each time something amusing happened now Clark missed the fun of telling Carole about it and hearing her shrieks of laughter. Like the time Bill Meiklejohn, the head of Paramount's casting department, took him fishing for marlin on Joe Perditá's boat.

Bill knew that Clark often fell asleep when he went fishing, and he must have counted on that happening this time. He had only just dozed off when he felt a tremendous yank on his line.

Gable woke up and grabbed the pole. "A whale," he yelled in excitement. He pulled in the line. What came out of the water was an honest-to-God blue-eyed mermaid, seaweed in her hair, stripped to the waist and all finny tail below that.

"Jesus, I haven't been drinking *that* much!" exclaimed Clark. In his amazement he let go of the pole. That caused a tremendous hubbub.

"For God's sake, she's sinking. She'll drown," Meiklejohn cried.

"Who will drown, *the mermaid*?" Gables said, uncorking the nearest bottle of whisky.

The mermaid did almost drown, as it turned out. But the boys got her on board just in time and pumped the water out of her. Gable watched uncomprehendingly. Not until the mermaid recovered full consciousness did they introduce Clark to her. She turned out to be Esther Williams's stand-in. They'd borrowed the mermaid outfit from M-G-M's prop department, which had several mermaid suits left over from Esther's picture *Peabody's Mermaid*.

While Carole was alive there had always been fun and laughter and excitement in the house, phones ringing, packages arriving, people coming in and out. Yet they'd been happiest alone. There were the hundreds of nights they'd sat on the back porch admiring the view. He would sip his Scotch and soda, she would drink the beer she loved. They'd look at each other, smile, look around at the sloping hills that cupped their place. The whole valley and the hills seemed to belong to them. When he'd bought the place they'd had only a few neighbours. He could get on a horse and ride for miles, right to the beach at Santa Monica, without coming across a single house. But now they were putting up new homes all around him. Ranch homes the real estate men called them, though they stood on small patches of land. Carole, he thought, would not have liked all that building nearby, but she would have stayed.

He stayed.

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Sometimes he would stand and look at the two-story white brick and frame New England farmhouse, then he could imagine her running out to kiss him with some crazy wild-Indian yell on her lips. Putting yellow and green furnishings in the living-room was her idea. Surprising him with a small bar built into the wall upstairs was her idea.

"I did it," she had explained, "because of your bad habit of yelling for me to get you a nightcap after you get into bed. I got sick and tired of going downstairs at three in the morning."

But that was not the reason for that or for anything else she did for him. She had loved him with all her intense and passionate heart.

He could remember once telling James Street, the novelist, "I've been lucky, I've got a good job, a good wife and a good home—what else does a man want?"

But that was before, of course, and now the best part of his luck was long gone and far away.

Most nights now the world's most loved man was alone. Nobody can remember his giving a party. If anyone suggested it, Clark shook his head and asked, "Who would come?"

M-G-M had paid Gable \$150,000 a year during the time he was in the Army. He had thought it only fair for him to keep his household staff, including a caretaker, a cook, Rufus Martin, his butler-valet, a maid, and his secretary, Jean Garceau, on his personal payroll, instead of shutting up the house until he came back.

"Sometimes Clark wouldn't care to talk," Menasco says. "He was the kind of guy you could sit around with for hours, not saying anything, just sitting with a bottle of whisky on the table between you. You didn't need words with that fellow. Sometimes he would ask me to stay overnight. And I would. But I never suggested it. I always was afraid of boring him.

"He never talked about his business, only actor I ever heard of who didn't. We two never did any business together until years later when we both invested some money in some land up in the Napa Valley, near San Francisco."

Sometimes Al had fun joking with Gable about his big salary, which by then had been established at \$7,000 a week.

"That isn't such a hell of a lot of money you make," he said one evening. "We have a little branch salesroom in Eagle Rock where we do that much business—two hundred and fifty thousand a year."

Gable winked, laughed, and said, "It's three hundred and fifty thousand, bud."

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But he didn't care for inquiries from strangers about his earnings. Once a woman reporter asked him, "Just how much money do you make, Mr. Gable?" And he replied, "Madam, that's none of your god-damned business."

After a while Clark began to appear at the Hollywood drinking spots and parties. As the world's most famous actor he was a prime target for designing females, but he'd drop any woman cold who even mentioned marriage or whom he suspected of seeking publicity with stories that they were engaged.

Sometimes, between pictures, he would go off in his car all alone. He was not now always hunting the birds and beasts of the forest, but had become hungry to rub shoulders ~~once~~ more with human beings untouched by the Hollywood taint, men and women who had no angle, who weren't working night and day to use you or promote you.

Clark would drive into some little town, drop into a restaurant. When the waitress came around he would ask her what was good to eat. He would order whatever she recommended and some drinks. If the waitress was attractive to him he would ask if there was a good place to stay. Nine times out of ten the waitress would not only direct him to some motel but would stay there all night with him. And this is what he liked even when he was in his forties, the casual encounter, the embrace for the night, and then good-bye with no involvement afterwards or complications.

He promised the women nothing—and he gave them nothing, except an experience that none of them ever forgot: a night of love-making with Clark Gable.

Some of Hollywood's most intelligent beauties set their caps for Clark during the years after Carol's death. They were clever, experienced and knowledgeable women. But they all failed with him for a variety of reasons. Most of them were too aggressive. They may have been deceived by the trick he had not lost of looking at each woman as though entranced, but he had the old-fashioned idea that the man should make the passes.

One of Hollywood's veteran woman reporters, a wise, witty middle-aged woman, has this to say.

"For the women he liked, Clark Gable was out of this world. If you interested him or amused him he could play a romance with humour. And then no woman ever lived who could resist him. He was a man of direct, physical action, not bright about using words,

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but possessing great intuitive intelligence. He was somehow a realist and a romantic together, a man of great dignity, particularly considering that he was in a business about as dignified as pawnbroking or professional wrestling.

"The great thing each woman remembered about him was how he looked at her. I have known very few men who were so aware of women. He could see you at a big party if you walked in with ninety people. And somehow he got that flattering thought to you. His eyes took in every detail of such a lucky woman's appearance. Her clothes, her hair-do. He would ask, 'Why didn't you wear that' wonderfully attractive blue dress you had on last time I saw you?'

"It was the most flattering thing. For you'd feel that he was interested in you both as a woman and a person. Another thing that thrilled you was the feeling he gave you of being alive in every nerve, pore and corpuscle. And he was so *huge*. If he stood in any doorway, he seemed to fill it. And any woman of taste shared an odd thing with him because of his flair for clothes. This man's man had chic in exactly the same way that certain women have it. You felt his taste and his elegance were due to something within him.

"And I have never known anyone," she went on, "whose instinct for doing the right thing was so instinctive and unerring. I've seen him handle embarrassing situations in which sex-maddened women put him. Few brilliant men could have thought as quickly as he acted out of pure instinct. He just reacted as though his muscles were doing his thinking for him. I mean, in the way they say a great boxer's muscles do or a gambler's hands which automatically shuffle and cut cards without his thinking about it. But let me give you an example.

"The incident happened at a very elegant party in a very elegant Hollywood home. Gable was sitting, holding a drink, in a big arm-chair. The wife of one of our most successful producers came in. She had never met him, but knew he was going to be there. On coming in, she opened her dress in the front—she had nothing whatever on underneath—ran over to him and straddled his knees. Gable never stopped smiling.

"But he got out of that embarrassing and ridiculous position immediately by tilting his chair backwards so that they both sprawled out on the floor. He laughed at that, as though it was an accident and a great joke, scrambled to his feet and helped up the woman. Few people had seen what she did so shamelessly and both of them were saved embarrassment."

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Among the women driven wild just by Gable's proximity was a woman star who was noted for her happy home life with her husband and two children. She and Gable were seated together at a dinner party one night. She literally could not keep her hands off him. They had hardly sat down when he felt her hand on his thigh.

"Cut it out," he whispered, "there is a time and place for everything. This is neither."

Then she did something so outrageous with her hand that he gripped it under the table. "I told you," he said, still whispering, "to cut it out,"

"What will you do, if I don't cut it out?"

"I'll spank you, that's what."

"I can think of you doing only one thing to me that I would enjoy more."

Each time he let go of her hand she went back to his thigh. Finally, deciding she was not to be stopped any other way, he pushed his chair back, grabbed her, turned her over on his knee and spanked her to the astonishment of the other guests, including the lady's husband. When he thought she'd had enough of a spanking, he put her back in her chair and resumed eating where he had left off.

Being Clark Gable he could get away with things that in anyone else would have invited contempt or ridicule. For some years in the late forties he was in the habit of spending evenings with a woman who lived in Hollywood, but was not in films. She says, "When he was in the habit of coming to see me, he would call up and say he'd like to come by. Knowing how much he could drink, I always told him the same thing: 'Bring some booze.'"

"'What for?'"

"'Bring some booze,' I would repeat."

"When he got there with a bottle of Scotch or good bourbon, he would ask, 'What have you got to eat tonight?'"

"'Pork and beans,' I'd tell him, 'they're good enough for you. You see, he never gave a party, never bought anyone dinner."

"And if he liked you, he did not mind your saying things like that—about bringing whisky, and that pork and beans were good enough for him. But frugal or not, he was irresistible. For Clark was a rarity even among true gentlemen, being a dignified man who at the same time never took himself seriously."

And the Years Raced By

THE magic hold of Clark Gable on the public was never better demonstrated than in the last dozen years of his life. While Hollywood's vast studios shrunk, withered and almost disappeared, his legend kept growing. This though his films continued to be both bad and to lose money. He also went through another divorce, was involved as the other man in a nasty divorce suit, not to mention endless romantic capers that would have made any other middle-aged Romeo seem ridiculous.

And now it was true that the fans did not lay a hand on him as he walked down crowded boulevards. Now more than ever he seemed a man out of another age, some age of giants and folklore heroes when it was possible for people to live out their lives on their own terms.

When he had his fill of grief, Clark began to live in a way he'd never tried before. He was often in night clubs and at the sort of Hollywood parties he'd always detested. He drank more and more. He also travelled more than ever.

He was looking for another Carole, though he didn't seem to realize it. Inevitably, his name was linked by gossip columnists with dozens of beautiful women.

At times he seemed to be on a high-society prowl. Almost every week you'd read that he'd been dining with such wealthy social butterflies as Mrs. Dolly O'Brien of Palm Beach, Mrs. Betty Chisholm of Arizona, and Mrs. Millicent Rogers of everywhere.

At the same time he was by no means overlooking the blonde, brunette and red-headed beauties of show business. His dates included

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Paulette Goddard, Virginia Grey, Kay Williams, Madeleine Carroll, Marilyn Maxwell, Joan Blondell and Ava Gardner, also producer Joan Harrison, the vivacious publicity woman, Anita Colby, and Elaine White, a M-G-M secretary.

But he married none of them. Impetuously he decided that a Jennie-come-lately from London, one Lady Sylvia Ashley, would make a most worthy successor to Carole. She was blonde, gay and full of bounce. One other thing she had in common with Carole was a love of parties and good times, preferably in the best places. It did not seem to occur to Clark that Lady Sylvia might be less willing than Carole to give up the bright lights and late nights.

When they went to Howard Strickling and told him of their marriage plans, the M-G-M publicity chief asked Clark, "Do you actually want to go through with this?"

"He certainly does," Sylvia said.

"I wasn't talking to you," Strickling said.

"It will be all right," Gable assured him.

Lady Ashley was a dazzling blonde who wore her long hair down over one eye. Still under forty, Sylvia had been married three times. Two of her husbands had been titled Englishmen. The other was the late Douglas Fairbanks, who'd died and left her over a million dollars.

Sylvia had gone well for a girl who started life as the daughter of a London footman and pub keeper. In her teens she had been a lingerie model and a chorus girl on the London stage. That's how she'd met her first husband, Lord Anthony Ashley, heir of the Earl of Shaftesbury. He had divorced her, naming Fairbanks as co-respondent. The scandal had broken up the Mary Pickford-Doug Fairbanks marriage, the most respected and renowned in all show business. After Fairbanks died, Sylvia had married, early in 1914, Edward John, Lord Stanley of Alderley, and the grandson and heir of the Earl of Derby. A year or so later he petitioned the courts for separation, alleging adultery by Sylvia with an unnamed co-respondent. Blitzed Britain was full of sweat, blood and tears, and Lord Stanley charged that Sylvia had refused to live on his country estate, and gave him "nothing but bitterness and vituperation". Sylvia counter-sued, charging that her husband owned her \$15,000 which she had advanced him to establish bank accounts, buy a Rolls Royce and "pay off a person to whom he owed \$1,500."

As in most messy English divorces the courts there took a long time—until 1914—to grant a decree.

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Clark met her in October of 1914, and they were married on a ranch near Santa Barbara two months later, on December 20. The ceremony was performed by Rev. Aage-Møller, the pastor of a Danish Lutheran Church. Three days later they sailed for a honeymoon in Hawaii.

The marriage didn't last long. Clark later told his best friend that he'd realized within three weeks that he'd made a mistake.

Sylvia had been able to twist Fairbanks around her little finger, and she saw no reason not to try that with Clark. Like all marriages that end badly there were two sides to the story. Sylvia, for one thing, had violent objections to living surrounded by possessions and mementoes of her husband's dead wife.

When they returned from the honeymoon she lost no time in putting out of sight Carole's collections of pewter and pink and white china, and Carole's furniture. Sylvia replaced everything she could with antiques which she brought over from London. She also took down Clark's guns and replaced them with paintings. Larry Barbier says, "She made that gun room look like a reception hall of a French whorehouse." She converted the man's house into a woman's house, frilly and ornamental, where Clark was not comfortable.

When they went out she insisted on taking her little Chihuahua, Minnie, along everywhere. She liked to make Clark carry Minnie and she pointed out to everybody the diamond bracelet he had bought her darling little dog.

What Clark objected to most, he said, was having her sister, brother-in-law and their children at the house much of the time. He liked his in-laws reasonably well, but he liked his privacy a lot more.

Sylvia also wanted him to replace Martin, his butler, with a proper English butler. She objected to his secretary having her office in the house. Clark built a guest house on the property with two rooms upstairs and a wonderful office for the secretary on the ground floor. Sylvia also objected to the maid, wanted a new one, also a lady's maid to attend to her wants.

But Sylvia did try to do what he wanted. She went hunting with him, and hated it. She went on location while Clark worked in *Across the Wide Missouri*, and loathed the discomfort.

Within a year the marriage was on the rocks.

Clark took one trip to Nassau with her but rebelled against taking another a few months later. Sylvia announced, "All right then, I'll go

alone." Clark seemed not to mind too much. When she returned, Sylvia could not get back into the house at Encino.

Clark had changed all the locks.

Perhaps if she had got in she would not have recognized the place, anyway. Clark had put away all her things and replaced them with his guns and everything else she had removed.

On May 31, eighteen months after the wedding, Sylvia filed suit for divorce. Clark had an idea that if she couldn't have him, Sylvia would try to make do with his money. The fact that she got Jerry Geisler, California's smartest lawyer, to represent her confirmed his darkest suspicions.

Clark told her, Sylvia said, "I don't want to be married to you any longer. Or to anyone else." As one can see, he had not changed his dialogue for scenes with wives he was discarding since he'd dropped Josephine. "This was the first inkling I had that anything was wrong," Sylvia explained. "I tried everything to keep the marriage going."

After Clark made his brief announcement, Sylvia had been unable to reach him. At M-G-M, when she called there, she was told crisply, "Mr. Gable has been suspended from the payroll."

Clark had asked the company to suspend him to prevent Sylvia and her all-too-efficient attorney from grabbing any of those big weekly cheques of his.

But that was just the beginning.

At the preliminary hearing Mr. Geisler announced suavely he would not ask any alimony *at this time*. He preferred to have the court inquire into Mr. Gable's finances and then pass on the justice of a property settlement. The words chilled Clark. They were too much like those Ria's lawyer had used before stripping him of everything he owned.

Clark went into a frenzy of defensive action. The following week he asked the court not to award Sylvia alimony because she was worth about a million and a half already. He listed among her assets a half-interest in the \$1,000,000 Rancho Zorro in San Diego; jewellery appraised at \$378,385 which she had had only fifteen months before. He said she had brought \$90,000 worth of additional jewellery from England. Her furs were worth \$12,000, he said, and she had \$37,000 in securities, a \$50,000 beach home in Santa Monica, \$15,000 in additional beach property and had received \$50,000 from the sale of the films made by her late husband, Douglas Fairbanks, Sr.

Meanwhile he was moving all his own assets out of California as rapidly as possible. He established residence at Glenbrook, Nevada, and

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transferred all his cash, stocks and securities to banks in that state. He said he would put the Encino farm and his other property holdings on the market. He replaced his California licence plates with Nevada plates. He even switched his membership in the Shriners to a Nevada temple. Finally, he declared he would rather retire from pictures than pay alimony to Lady Ashley.

A lot of legal skirmishing and inside fighting followed. But when everything was settled, Clark had to pay Sylvia \$250,000.

"She's a fine woman," he told reporters. "It is ~~too~~ bad that we couldn't get along."

Sylvia spoke very well of him also. Her only complaint was that he hadn't bought her a single present all the time they were married. "But then," she added, "he did buy Minnie, my little dog, a diamond bracelet, didn't he?"

After the divorce Sylvia, crying bitterly and apparently heart-broken, sailed for Hawaii on George Vanderbilt's yacht. As the yacht left, Gable was doing the first love scene with Ava Gardner in *Lone Star*, his newest picture.

As he left Ava's arms, Clark, eyes sparkling, said, "All I can say, gentlemen, is that *there* is an awful lot of woman." Once again it had not been *his* heart that was broken.

Just the same, quite a change came over Clark after that divorce. He continued to drink heavily and also put on weight. He seemed no longer to care how he looked.

It disturbed his friend, Z. Wayne Griffin, who is now an investment consultant, that Gable never used planes while travelling. Mr. Griffin understood why. The very sight of a plane reminded Clark both of Carol's horrible death and the many AAF youngsters he'd known who hadn't come back from bombing expeditions. One day Griffin said, "This is a bad thing, don't you think? And isn't it time you got over it?"

Clark, as usual, said, "Let me think about it."

The following day he told Griffin, "You are right."

And the next long trip he made was to Africa for *Mogambo*. Clark went on a DC-3. On the way the ship flew into a hailstorm. The stones which were as big as walnuts hammered the big airship like bullets, damaging it badly.

"Didn't that cool you off some about flying?" Griffin asked Clark when he came back.

"A little," Clark said. "But I wasn't scared. I think when a man's time to go comes, he goes."

It was while making *Mogambo* in the middle of Africa, under John Ford's direction, that Gable and Grace Kelly became good friends. Ava Gardner, the third star in the picture, was also an intense admirer of his. Clark was thrilled to be in Africa. And who wouldn't like to work in the bush with the sultry Ava on one hand and Grace Kelly, beautiful if a bit frost-bitten in appearance, on the other? But the Great Lover was capable of fatherly relationships with young girls and that's what his attitude to Grace was—at the beginning.

His shooting eye startled Murray Smith, the head white hunter, whose job was to see that his seven white aides killed enough game each day to feed the company and the 300-odd natives of Kenya who did the manual work for the troupe.

Smith was very contemptuous of actors as hunters until he took Gable out with him. Clark that day shot dead with one bullet each two impala and a reedbuck, getting each animal through the eye. He next killed, again with his first shot, a crocodile. The troupe's press agent tried to get Clark to pose for his picture with the crocodile. But just then crusty old John Ford came along and said, "What have we here, another Errol Flynn?"

Gable refused to pose for the picture. Actually, what he saw of big-game hunting sickened him as a sportsman. He called it organized slaughter of fine animals and said if he went back there he would do all his shooting with a camera.

The exquisite-looking Miss Kelly became the apple of Clark's eye after she went with him and other troupers on a safari. For months afterwards Clark talked about how Grace had gone through the bush with him like a real tomboy, without worrying or complaining about vicious bug bites, deep scratches of the unfriendly African shrubbery, the heat or anything else.

After the troupe returned to Hollywood the couple had a few dates. Grace had dinner with him at the house in Encino. But their budding romance never bloomed. Miss Kelly, who was then twenty-four, might have become Mrs. Clark Gable No. 5. She confided to friends that, with one exception, she found everything about him enchanting.

"But his false teeth were just too much," she said.

Mogambo was a surprise hit. It was also the picture that got enormous free publicity while it was being made, thanks to Frank Sinatra. The singer was at the moment all but dead of love for his estranged wife, Ava Gardner.

He went all the way to Africa to plead with Ava to make up with

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him, and was turned down. The public followed avidly front-page reports of this effort of the brokenhearted troubadour to re-woo his love in Darkest Africa. When Ava refused to be his once more, they jumped to the conclusion that Gable must be responsible, which was not true.

It was about the only big money-maker Gable made for M-G-M during his last years on that lot. It abruptly changed the studio's plans to drop him. By that time they had dropped most of their other big stars. Remakes are seldom successful and little had been expected of Mogambo. But when it attracted big crowds to the box office, the Culver City bigwigs realized that Gable, with the right director and story, was still the biggest drawing card around.

Clark was fully aware of all of this, but he got out of the contract, Eddie Mannix says, only because of a peculiar California State law designed to protect underpaid workers from unfair labour practices. This law stipulated that no contract running longer than five years could be renewed. Gable's current contract with the company, which was just about to expire, was for seven years. So M-G-M, though it had changed its opinion of Gable's box-office value, was unable to pick up the option on his services.

When he first told Mannix that other studios were bidding for his services, his friend said, "Call me up the night before you sign any such deal. Tell me the terms, and I'll make you a better offer."

Gable, who had been making something between \$7,500 and \$10,000 a week, at M-G-M, did that. Mannix was ready with a superior offer, but Gable refused it. He had made fifty-four pictures there in twenty-three years. But it still infuriated him that M-G-M, while taking in so many millions with *Gone With the Wind*, had never cut him in on a penny. By that time, incidentally, they had acquired 100 per cent ownership of Selznick's masterpieces. Every few years they were making additional millions of dollars from *Gone With the Wind* by reviving it. But they could not have so much as obtained distribution rights if they hadn't had Gable under contract. He also resented the company's refusal to give him the same percentage deal on his pictures that stars at other studios were now getting.

And so, on a March day in Clark Gable left M-G-M. "I bet those big shots in the front office won't even give me a good-bye lunch," he grumbled that morning to a friend in the publicity department. "And after all the millions of bucks they've made with me."

He was wrong. They did give him a lunch. When the time came

for Clark to make a speech he got up and said, "I wish to pay tribute to my friends and associates who are no longer alive."

Then he sat down.

The studio needed him desperately on one occasion for a picture. Clark kept sending in his agent. "See how high you can get those sons-of-bitches to go," he said. "And when you get their very best offer, tell them to take the money, their studio, their cameras and lighting equipment and shove it!"

"Can I tell them *that*?" the agent asked happily. "All my life I've wanted to say that to those highhanded big shots!"

M-G-M's top offer was \$450,000 for the picture. All the executives got from their ex-king was that vulgar response.

Gable's first free-lance deal was with 20th Century-Fox for two pictures. He was said to have been guaranteed \$500,000 for each movie against a percentage of the profits. The payments for these and his subsequent pictures were spread out over the years to avoid paying ruinous taxes. The two pictures—*Tall Men* with Jane Russell and *Soldier of Fortune* with Susan Hayward—were not great successes.

Clark wanted to get Grace Kelly for *Soldier of Fortune*, but she had too many commitments. Susan Hayward, a first-rate actress with a first-rate temper, did not get along with him. One can hardly blame the hotheaded Brooklyn redhead for erupting after she heard Clark's comment about her. On being told she would be his co-star, he said, "Hayward. Who is she?"

After being reminded that Miss Hayward had been a ranking star for years, he grumbled. "Okay, I goofed, I know who she is perfectly well. The name just slipped my mind for a moment."

But he got along well with Jane Russell, his co-star in *Tall Men*. The company did a lot of shooting in Mexico. Gable planned to tip the Mexican chauffeur assigned to him \$100, but he made the mistake of giving the man the money a few days before the company finished its shooting below the border. That was the last seen of the chauffeur.

On the way back the company stopped for lunch at an inn in El Paso. By chance the El Paso Garden Club was having its weekly meeting there. Tremendous twittering arose among the green thumb and compost experts on hearing that the great lover was on the premises. They sent messages imploring Clark to address them.

After having about four shots of bourbon Gable agreed. He went out, bowed and said, "Ladies, I have only two words to say to you—cultivate and fertilize!" Gable walked off to a standing ovation.

For more than a year the smut-sheet *Confidential* investigated Gable's love life, trying to turn up something juicy or spicy. The magazine had coined a fortune exposing the sensational love lives of other big stars. But when they tried to get something on Clark they ran into a stone wall. None of the women he'd had affairs with could be lured, loved, or bribed into talking about him.

The best *Confidential* could do was charge Clark with being a cheap-skate. They pictured Josephine Dillon, who was still giving lessons in the drama, as a poverty-stricken old lady living in a barn in North Hollywood, forgotten and neglected by Clark, for whom she had done so much. Indifferent to her fate, he rode past every day over a nearby highway in his chauffeur-driven limousine.

Hedda Hopper, Clark's best friend among the town's gab-and-gossip columnists, asked him whether he had ever paid Josephine any alimony.

"She never asked me for a single thing," Clark replied. "I am quite certain that I never gave her anything. I haven't seen her for twenty-five years."

Hedda suggested that it might be a gracious gesture if he did something now for the woman who had helped him so much when he desperately needed it. Clark didn't reply, and the subject was dropped.

But some time after this Gable made arrangements to pay off the mortgage and overdue taxes on Josephine's property.

He also paid to have her studio repaired and painted. But he had the property registered in his name. Josephine could live there rent-free for the rest of her days. She would get the property only if he died before she did, which seemed unlikely, as she was then close to seventy.

The flurry about the *Confidential* attack on Gable brought reporters to his door from all over the country. Among them was Jess Stearn, crack feature writer for the New York *Daily News*. At first Clark would not see him. Dave Chasen, a former vaudeville comedian's stooge turned restaurateur, warned him against talking to the *Daily News* man.

"Didn't you get enough punishment from *Confidential*?" he said. "You want more from *this* scandal sheet?"

Harry Brand, publicity chief of 20th Century-Fox, became indignant enough at the one-time stooge's interference to go to Clark's house.

"The newspaper with the biggest circulation in America," he told Gable, "thinks enough of you to send their best feature writer three thousand miles to talk to you. But you won't see him."

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Clark saw Stearn the next day, liked him, gave him all of the time he needed. The *Daily News* man got some stuff from Gable that had never been published before.

Gable explained very frankly about M-G-M being quite willing to let him go until *Mogambo* turned into a gold mine, and his discontent with the stories the studio had been giving him.

"But *Soldier of Fortune*," Stearn said, "that was pretty lousy, wasn't it?"

"I had to take that one to get *Tall Men*."

Gable also told Stearn of his horror of doing costume pictures. He had turned down *Quo Vadis*, and also the role of Lancelot in *King Arthur* (which was credited with saving Robert Taylor's career when Taylor was being labelled a has-been). His reason was the same in both cases. "Can you imagine me in short pants with my knobby knees?" Jean Harlow was his favourite leading lady, he said, because "you could talk to her just as you can to a man".

Gable also revealed that Howard Strickling was responsible for his having given out so few newspaper interviews in twenty years. But now he was finding that he liked to talk to reporters. It was his opinion that Garbo, the M-G-M sphinx, had been muzzled in the same way against her own wishes.

When Stearn asked for a look at the Oscar Gable had won for *It Happened One Night*, he got a surprise. It was not in the house.

"Friend of mine was up here with her son one day," Clark said casually. "He admired the Oscar so much that I gave it to him."

"Was this after *Gone With the Wind*?" asked the shrewd Stearn.

"Yes," Clark said. He admitted that when he didn't get one for playing Rhett Butler, the statuette had stopped meaning anything to him. The boy he'd given the Oscar to was Fieldsie Lang's son, Richard.

Stearn asked him if it was true that his doctor had warned him that he was going to too many parties.

"Oh, yeah, I heard about that," Gable said. "I was having a highball at the time."

Clark always made much fun of being called 'The Great Lover' and said, "As many a disappointed young lady can tell you, I'm 'a lousy lay'."

Clark's last marriage turned out to be the happiest imaginable plot turn in Clark's romantic life story. He and Kay Spreckles were friends of long standing.

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They had met seventeen years before while she was a bit player at Metro. Al Menasco and Clark's other friends had always hoped he would marry either Kay or Virginia Grey, an actress who loved him for years.

Kay had been married twice before meeting Clark in the late forties. She was a glorious-looking creature, a pure blue-eyed blonde Nordic type, healthy, athletic, was also as feminine as silk stockings.

Shortly before he ran off with Lady Ashley, Kay married Adolph Spreckles, Jr., the eccentric heir to that San Francisco family's sugar millions. Kay was his fifth wife, and had two children by him, Adolph 3rd, and Joan.

The marriage was a storm all the way. It ended with Spreckles beating her up, using her slipper to batter her face. Kay was taken to a hospital, had him arrested and started divorce proceedings.

Clark's name was dragged into the hearings when Spreckles declared in court that Kay had admitted having "intimate" relations with Clark, a charge which she indignantly denied. Kay was awarded a divorce. The newspapers reported that she was given alimony upwards of \$500,000 and that a fund of \$1,000,000 for each of the children was also established by Spreckles and his family.

After Clark was divorced (and Lady Ashley was unique because unlike the others she married again after becoming the ex-Mrs. Gable) Kay and he were seen everywhere together. Kay made no secret of her eagerness to become his No. 5. In fact, she might have been a little too eager. While on his way to Hong Kong to make *Soldier of Fortune*, he told a reporter who asked him about the romance, "Kay and I are just old friends."

He was in China by the time she read his announcement in a Los Angeles newspaper. Grabbing the phone she called him up in Hong Kong.

"Listen to me, you sonofabitch," she shouted. "Don't you dare be so patronizing to me. It will be a long, long time before I'll marry you."

And of course, that's precisely what Carole would have said. Later, Jess Stearn remembered how proud of Kay Clark seemed when describing her show of spirit.

Perhaps that's what made up his mind for him.

On July 11, Kay and Clark, accompanied by her sister, Mrs. Elizabeth Nasser of Los Angeles, Al and Julie Menasco, drove into the tiny town of Minden, Nevada. They were married by Justice of the

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Peace G. W. Fisher. Clark gave his age as fifty-four, Kay hers as thirty-four.

This was the beginning of a second wonderful life for Clark. Like Carole, Kay made keeping him happy and interested and amused her main business. She assured him that she didn't mind at all living surrounded by Carole's possessions.

Her own home in Beverly Hills, which she promptly put on the market, contained many precious antiques that her former mother-in-law, Alma de Bretteville Spreckles, had given her. But the best offer any dealer made was \$12,000. Kay thought the price ridiculous. Rather than accept it she shipped the treasures back to Mrs. Spreckles in San Francisco.

And she didn't try to compete with Clark's memory of Carole. She was able tranquilly to accept the idea that Clark could never love her as he had Carole. She'd been hurt by the failure of her three marriages. Now she wished to devote herself to a man she could both respect and adore. Having Clark to herself, being his wife, seeing that he was not annoyed or troubled by anything, was enough for her. She had every intention of making a career of it. She had one advantage over Carole, she didn't have to learn to love outdoor life. She had always loved camping, fishing, hunting, riding.

She took pride in showing visitors the lovely things that had belonged to the dead star. She wasn't Carole, but she was the next best thing, and she could swear very competently. When he had to go on location, she not only went with him, but she cooked for him and made it her business to see that he was comfortable and had everything.

Clark, who was always at his best with children, soon felt like the real father of her two.

Clark was making enormous sums of money from each new picture he made, but he seemed to have lost his old zest for acting. Two or three times he talked to Zack Griffin about retiring. "I think it's time for me to let someone else step in my shoes."

"There just isn't anybody like you," Griffin objected.

"Oh, plenty of these young fellows coming up now can take my place." His favourite among the new stars was Marlon Brando, whom he'd never met.

Zack Griffin was right. Not one of them was like Clark. Good as Brando was he was different, possibly a greater actor, but different, a powerhouse of a man but not lovable. Yet Clark had been at the top for a very long time. He felt there was nothing more for him to

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accomplish. He was more tired than ever of the endless wrangling over every detail of picturemaking, credits, temperamental clashes, the perpetual and pointless arguing.

The home, the wife and the family he had now at long last were more important to him than piling up more millions or seeing his name on theatre marquees all over the world. But Clark wanted one thing more. He wanted Kay to have a child by him. Kay had a heart condition, but the doctors said having another baby would not be dangerous.

One day she told him the good news: she was pregnant.

But after eleven weeks of carrying the baby she had a miscarriage, and Clark was plunged into gloom.

It was suggested they try again. He shook his head. The chances didn't look so good to him. One day he said to Al Menasco. "The combined ages of Kay and myself amount to almost one hundred years. I don't know. I sure don't know."

When he went to Italy to make *It Happened in Naples* with Sophia Loren, Kay and the children went with him.

Eileen Hughes, newspaperwoman, watched him for three days on the set there. What impressed her most was his courtliness and his affection for Kay's children. He spoke of them as "my kids". Intimates of his who later saw the picture, a comedy, said Clark looked to them as though he had been drunk from the start of the picture to the finish. But Mrs Hughes never saw him take a drink. "He gave off a great sense of virility," she says. "To me he was every inch the romantic hero that he was on the screen."

After the picture was finished, Clark went home for some fishing and a long rest. His next picture paid him \$750,000 with an added \$48,000 for each week he had to work beyond the agreed-on shooting limit.

The picture was *The Misfits*, a film written by Arthur Miller and with an all-star cast, headed by Gable and Miller's wife, the jiggling Marilyn Monroe. Among their co-stars were Montgomery Clift, Thelma Ritter, Eli Wallach. John Huston was the director. A good deal of the picture was shot on the desert under a broiling sun. The temperature rose to 135 degrees at times.

Clark, as always, arrived on time for each day's work. Few of the others, including Mr. Huston the director, ever did. Some days Clark would sit for hours, wild with impatience as he waited under the burning sun for the others to come and permit him to start work.

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Kay was with him, on location, keeping house for him. And one day she told him the great news he'd been hoping for. She was pregnant.

"And this time there will be no accident, Pa," she said. "And it will be a boy. I guarantee it."

Clark needed news like that to keep from going out of his mind. There were more delays, everything from sandstorms to last-minute script trouble. But it was the day-after-day waiting for the others to show up that Clark found insupportable.

Once he told them, "I put \$48,000-a-week-for-overtime clause in my contract not because I want the money, but to make sure you guys would get a move on. The money means nothing: I only get \$800 of the \$48,000 a week anyway."

The picture turned out to be a mixture that did not jell, a mixture of Miller's mysticism, high-flown language and Huston's violence. There was one agonizing scene in which Gable was dragged endlessly over the desert by a wild horse. He came up panting like a broken-down old fire engine. It was harrowing to hear and see.

Shooting on the picture had started in July. It was November before it was finished. Gable had never had a trace of heart trouble in his life. There was some talk that he had Parkinson's disease. He had taken off thirty pounds, it was said, too quickly before the picture. He had been drinking heavily while it was being made and then there was the sun. But he had not been too ill to take Al Menasco whirling over the hard desert sand at 148 miles an hour in his new Mercedes about ten days before the picture was finished.

Two days after he got home Gable suffered a severe chest pain while preparing to change a tyre. That was on Sunday morning, November 16, 1960. The night before, he had suffered an attack of what he believed was indigestion and possibly "a touch of the flu". He didn't want a doctor called, but in the morning he told Kay he felt terrible and the family physician, Dr. Fred Cerini, was summoned. The Encino Fire Department was asked to rush oxygen to the farm. Rescue Squad 88, manned by J. T. Michelangelo and Robert Cooper, responded and gave Clark emergency oxygen treatment. Even then he didn't want to go to the hospital. But a private ambulance, with Kay riding with him, took him to the Hollywood Presbyterian Hospital. The doctors there ran him through a series of tests. They pronounced him to be suffering from a coronary thrombosis. They said a clot had formed in a branch of the arteries leading to the heart

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muscle. One doctor remarked, "It's a lucky thing we got him here as soon as we did." Kay spent that night sleeping on a cot in Clark's hospital room. Six nurses were placed in attendance.

Next day he had what was described as "a slight flare-up", but was reported resting comfortably later on. Dr. Cerini gave him an injection to "counteract some coronary pain". Dr. George Griffith, the eminent heart specialist who had attended President Eisenhower during his heart attacks in 1955, had been called in by Dr. Cerini. The star's condition was reported as "satisfactory". After that he had several setbacks. Both physicians believed he had the reserve stamina to survive the critical fifteen-day period that follows such heart attacks.

However, on November 16, ten days after entering the hospital, Clark Gable was dead. B. J. Caldwell, administrator of the hospital, said, "Mr. Gable had a restful nap during the late afternoon. He was in very good spirits and felt very refreshed after he had been shaved by a barber. He and Mrs. Gable had dinner together and talked briefly.

"Mr. Gable slept for an hour after dinner and was visited again by Mrs. Gable. He was examined later by his doctor. Mrs. Gable then went to her room to retire.

"Mr. Gable was awake and being attended by a nurse," said Caldwell. "About 11 p.m. Mr. Gable just laid back his head and gasped. His nurse immediately summoned Mrs. Gable, and Dr. Cerini, who was in the hospital at the time. Every effort was made to revive him, but it was too late. He was gone. There was no pain."

Oxygen was administered but failed to revive him.

There were no last words. Dr. Cerini said, "He flipped a page of the magazine he was reading, his head went back, and that was it."

When they told Kay the news she went into his room and held him in her arms. Nobody could get her away. Only after two hours could she be talked into leaving. She was taken downstairs over a fire escape to avoid the reporters who were waiting to question her.

On November 18, the Los Angeles *Herald Express* carried a story that a heart machine might have saved Gable's life. There had been a pacemaker machine in Clark's room when he was first brought to the hospital. According to the *Herald Express*, Dr. Griffith explained that when Gable's condition showed such a remarkable improvement he ordered the machine taken out of the room because "I felt it was a morale factor weighing against his recovery".

Asked why no emergency treatment had been given, Dr. Cerini said, according to the same article, that "in an acute fresh injury, manipulation of the heart is not acceptable procedure".

In a prepared statement Dr. Griffith explained that massage might have caused the heart to rupture.

"It would be ideal," he said, "to have all such patients in a room fully equipped—as an operating room is—with a machine to stimulate the heart electrically. We were prepared originally, but felt there was no need to continue with such precautions."

In the prepared statement the physician said, "Death was unexpected and was undoubtedly due to the extension of the thrombosis. At no time was there any evidence of myocardial [heart] irritability."

Clark Gable was buried in a closed casket. He had told Kay, "I don't want a lot of strangers looking down at my wrinkles and my big, fat belly when I'm dead."

There were no rioting crowds at Gable's funeral.

In death as in life his fans respected the King. There was an Episcopal service for him in the Church of the Reccessional, at Forest Lawn Memorial Park. It was offered by Air Force Chaplain Johnson E. West, accompanied by an honour party of ten airmen and a colour guard. Jimmy Stewart, Spencer Tracy, Howard Strickling and Robert Taylor were among the stars who were there to say good-bye. There were others, hunting companions, neighbours, but not too many of any group.

It is estimated that the best-loved actor of all time left an estate in the neighbourhood of \$5,000,000; that includes the sizeable payments that will be coming in for years on the last pictures he made. He bequeathed everything he had to Kay. The only other bequest was the one to Josephine which gave her title to her studio and the land on which it stood.

Shortly after the funeral, Kay gave an amazing interview to a reporter on the Los Angeles *Mirror-News*. She said that what had happened while Clark was working on *The Misfits* had "helped kill him".

"It wasn't," she declared, "the physical exertion that did it. It was the horrible tension, that eternal waiting, waiting, waiting.

"He waited around for ever, for everybody. He'd get so angry, waiting, that he'd just go ahead and do anything to keep occupied. That's why he did those awful horse scenes where they dragged him

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at twenty-five to thirty miles an hour behind a truck. He had a stand-in and a stunt man, but he did them himself.

"I told him 'You're crazy', but he wouldn't listen.

"One night when he came out of the shower all one side was bloody from being dragged on a rope. I gave him some aspirin and put him to bed, I told him he was out of his mind."

About the child, Clark said as he left the location of *The Misfits*, "This is a dividend that has come to me late in life. When I wind up this picture I'm taking off until the baby is born in March. I want to be there when it happens and for a long time afterwards."

The baby was born to Kay by Caesarean section at 7.18 on the morning of March 20, —or just a little over five months after the death of his father. It was a boy, just as she had promised Clark it would be. The little man weighed eight pounds and looked exactly like his father, including the over-size eyes and the bat-wing ears. He was named John Clark Gable. He was christened a Catholic also, just like his father.

